# VIKING DESIGNS

A. G. Smith



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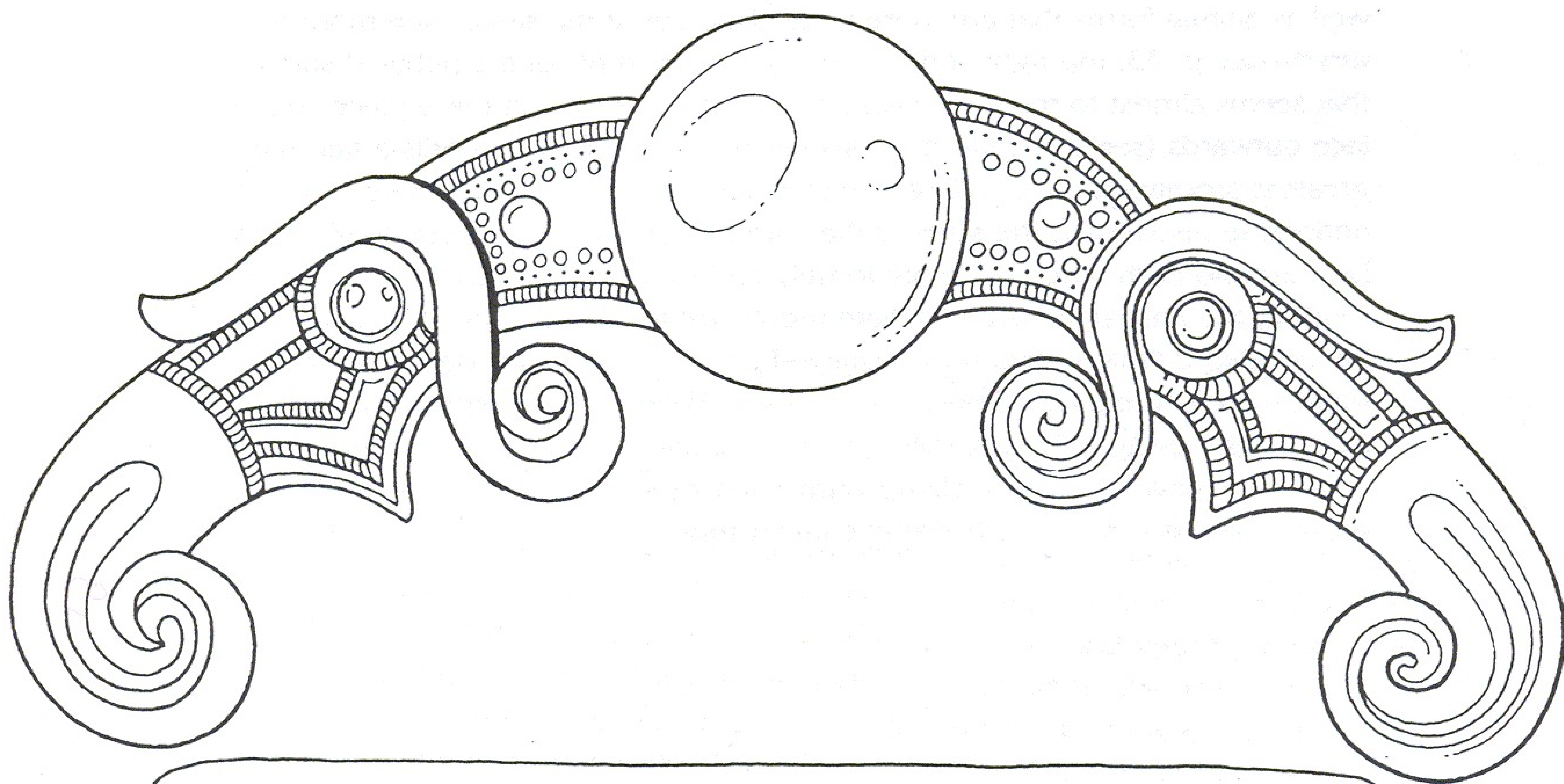
# PUBLISHER'S NOTE

The Viking Age spanned the ninth through the eleventh centuries. During this time the hardy, pagan, seafaring peoples of Norway, Sweden, and Denmark launched raid after raid upon their southern, eastern, and western neighbors, both pillaging and colonizing these lands. It is no wonder that they retain their reputation as merciless marauders to this day. Yet we now know that there was more than violence and plunder to Viking culture. Archeologists have uncovered and studied Viking burial mounds (in Oseberg and Gokstad, Norway, in Valsgärde and Broa, Sweden, in Sutton Hoo, England, and in Jelling, Denmark, for instance), farmsteads, trading centers and burial hoards. As a result, we now have a great deal of information about this complex and sophisticated society.

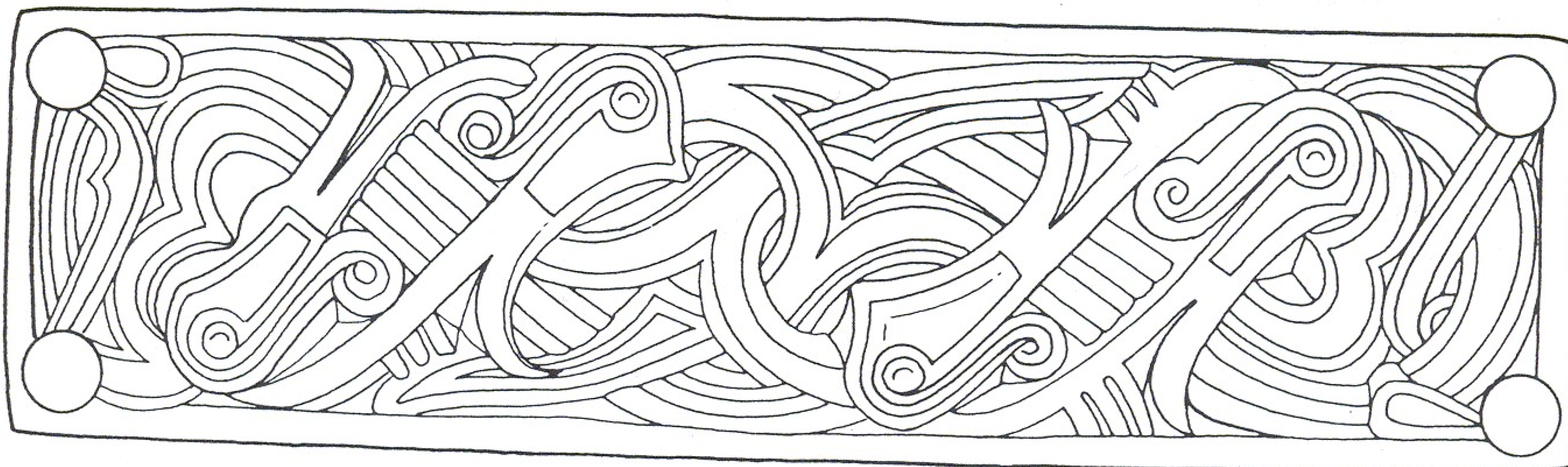
The Vikings excelled at far more than seafaring and foreign invasion. They were vigorous and thriving tradesmen. They were also master craftsmen and designers, especially in sculpture, woodworking, metalworking, jewelry design and, of course, shipbuilding. They developed a literature which was often highly complex, abstract and formal. Some of the Viking poetry of this nature was recorded later, in the Icelandic sagas; some of it can be found on rune-stones. Their largely decorative arts were ornate and stylized to a remarkable degree, yet archeologists have found six distinct styles of design in the artifacts as yet uncovered, demonstrating that the esthetic or style of their culture evolved and absorbed outside influences throughout its heyday. These styles, in chronological order, were: the Broa/Oseberg, Borre, Jellinge, Mammen, Ringerike, and Urnes—each named for the region in which it is thought to have originated.

Hallmarks of Viking art include dense decoration, symbols and depictions of combat, animal forms so stylized and contorted as to become barely recognizable, and complex interwoven patterns which sometimes stand on their own, sometimes grow out of the animal forms. In some periods, surfaces would be smooth and in others they would be textured by hatching or pebbling effects. In Broa/Oseberg-style pieces we see the first instances of the "gripping beast"—a creature with prominently featured paws clearly gripping onto something (see p. 10). This motif is seen again and again in various permutations—note that the bottom creature shown on p. 42, center, is actually gripping its feet with its hands and vice versa. Borre-style pieces often show creatures with bulging eyes, triangular forward-facing heads, and large ears (see p. 20, bottom right), whereas in Jellinge-style pieces the heads are slender, shown in profile, and nearly always sport pigtails (see p. 18, top). The elongated bodies of Jellinge-style creatures are frequently hatched, as if they were striped.

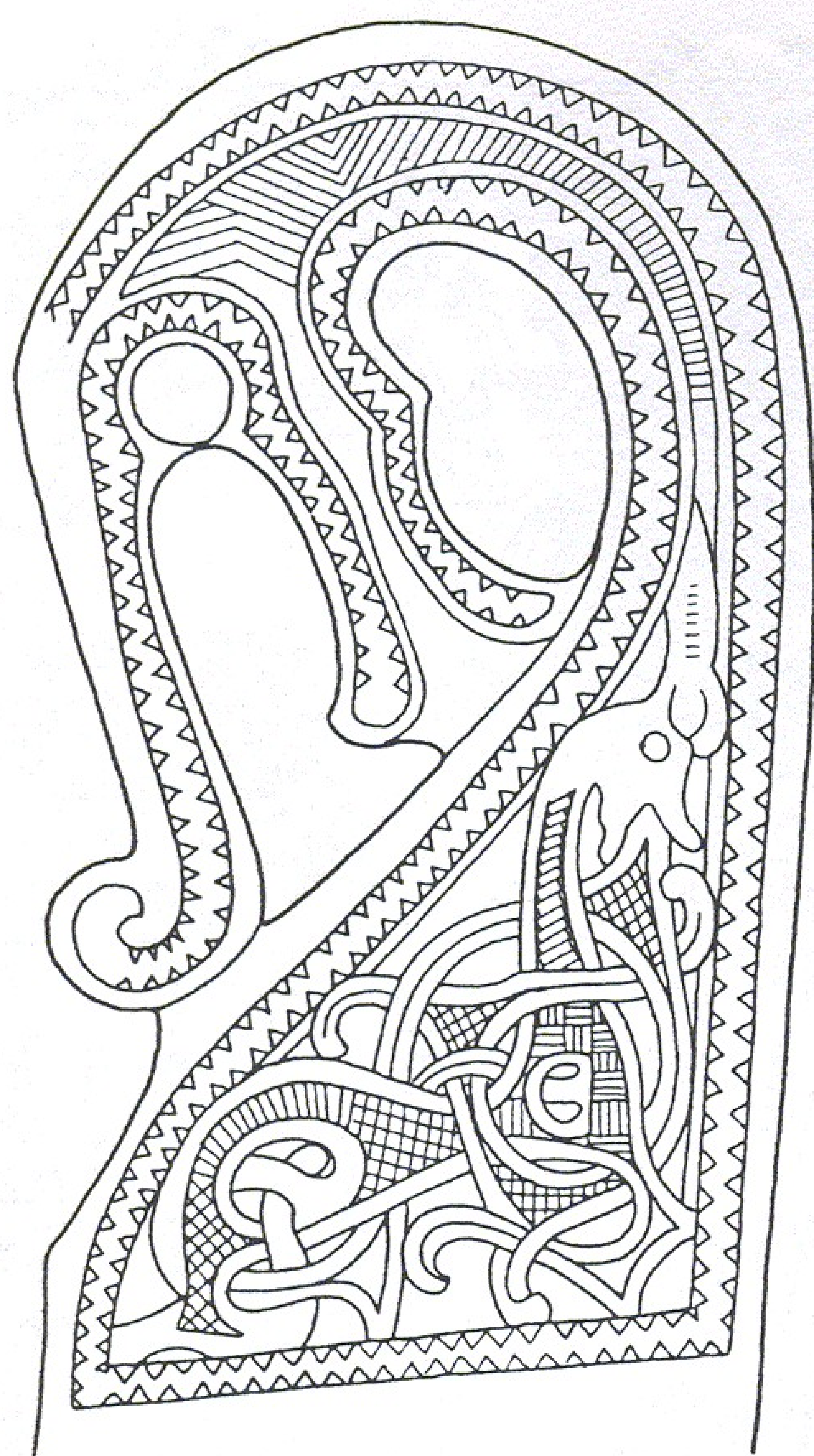
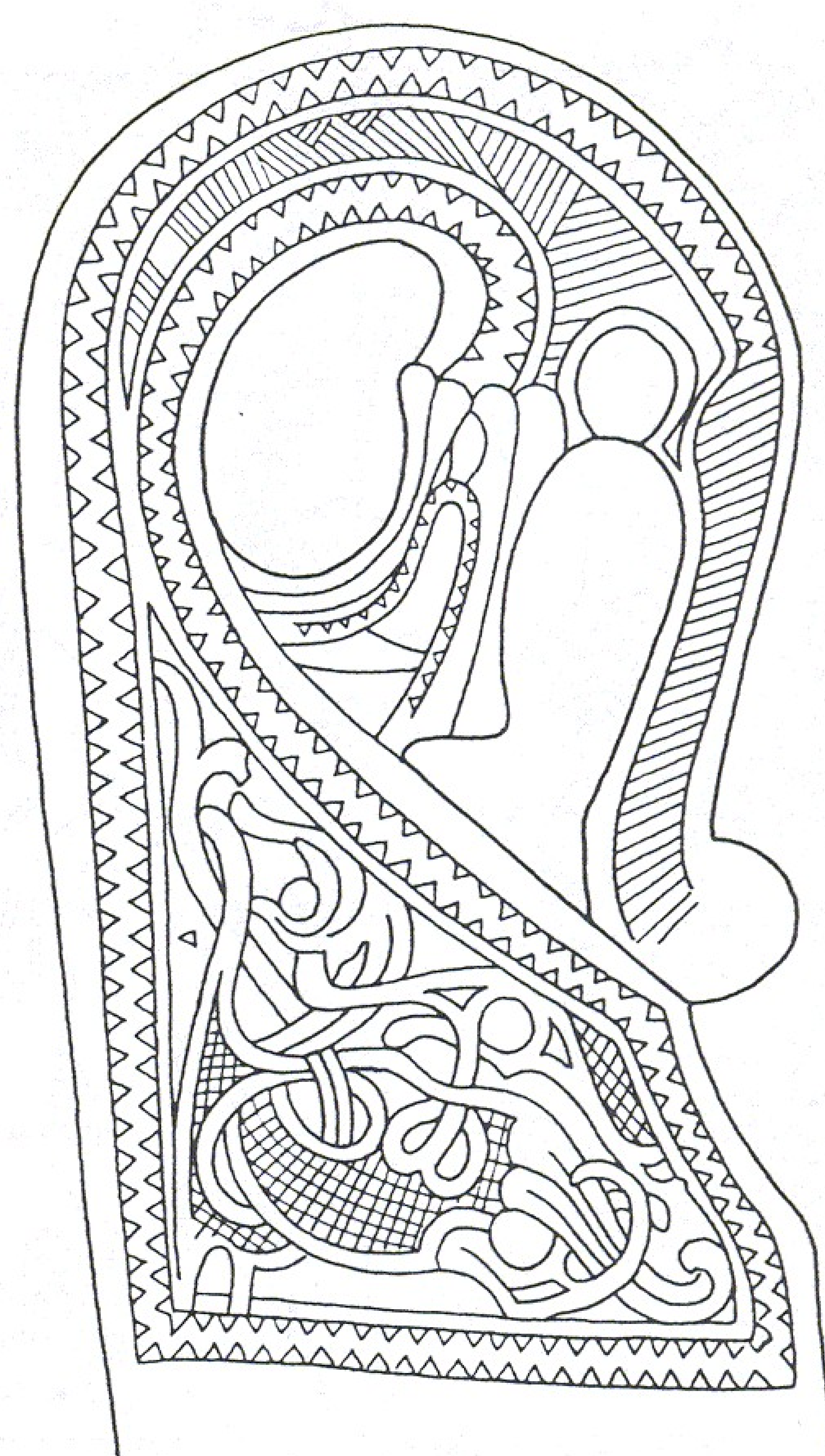
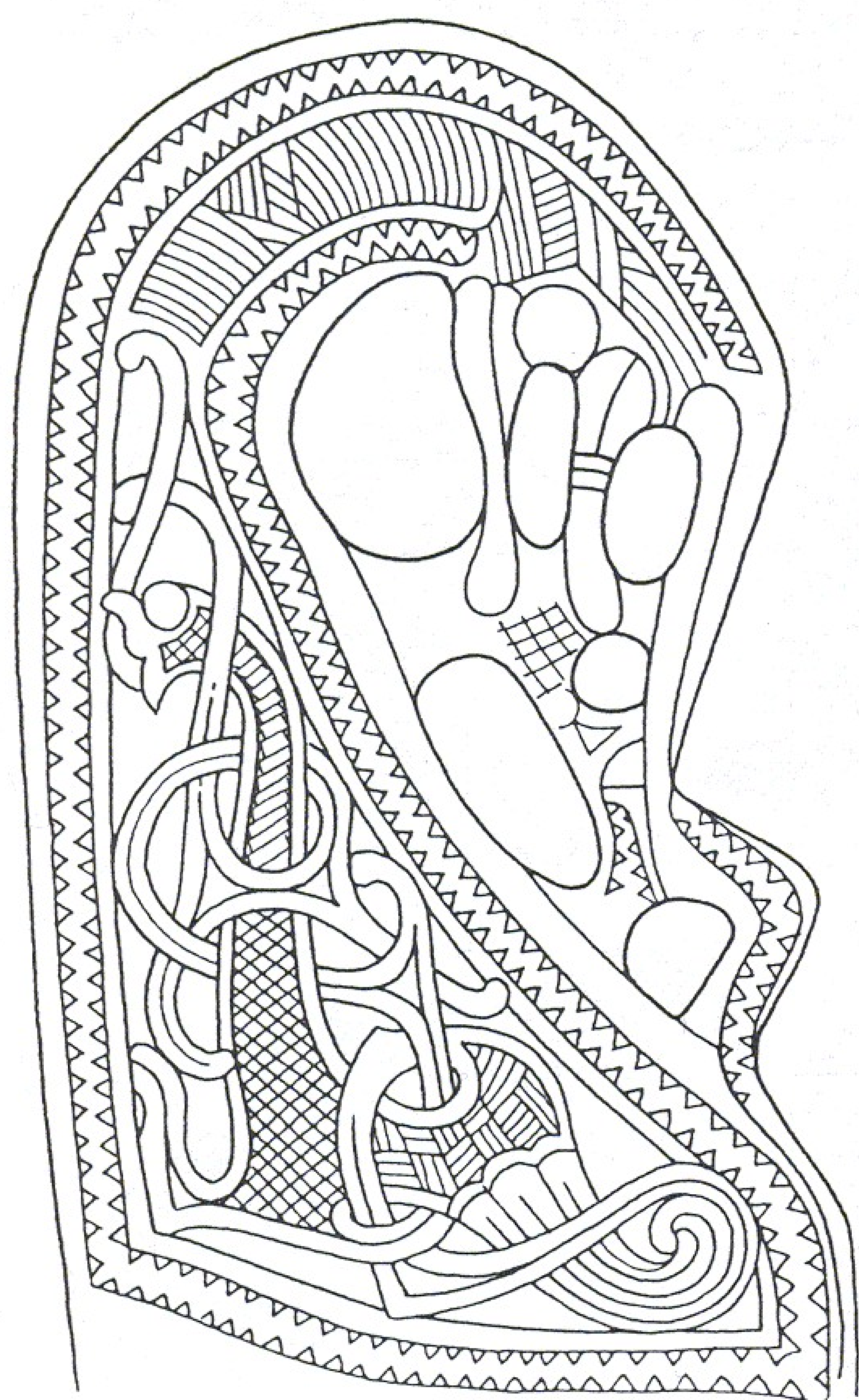
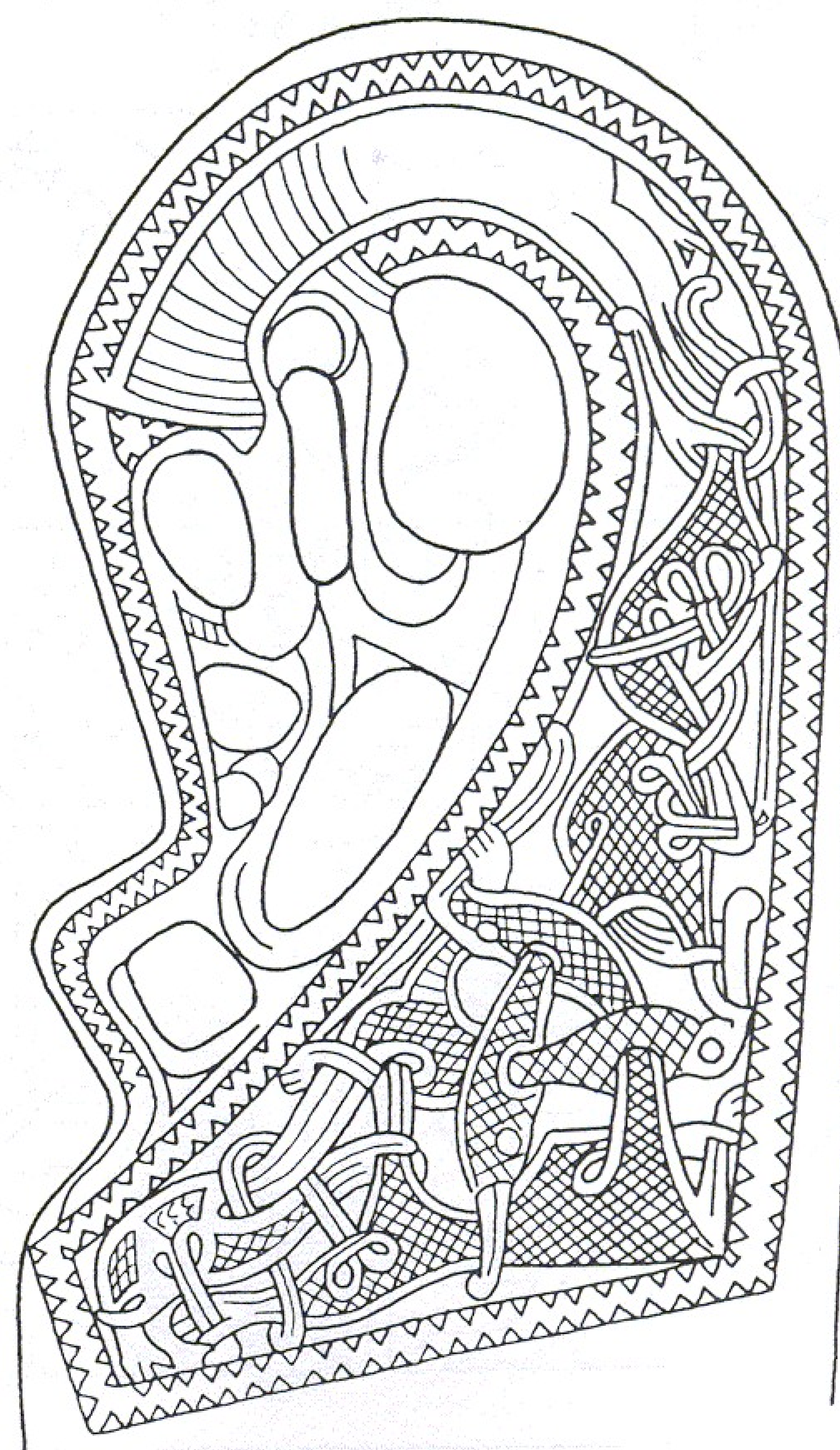
The Mammen style shows the Vikings' first known use of foliate motifs, as well as animal forms that are more naturalistic but at the same time more textured—see p. 43, top right and left, for a good example of the pebbled surface that seems almost to resemble snake or fish scales. Faces on these pieces often face outwards (see the bottom sword hilt on p. 35). Foliate motifs attain their greatest prominence in the Ringerike style and at the same time there is now a noticeable disparity in the sizes of the animals represented. These continue to loop around each other, but more loosely and simply (see p. 21 and p. 27 bottom). In the final style, Urnes, foliate motifs are less frequently seen while the interlocking animal motifs have achieved an unprecedented degree of grace, refinement, and intricacy (see p. 29, bottom). There is a new lightness and delicacy to the designs of this style, yet the animals, which no longer grip each other with paws, but now clamp onto each other's limbs with their slender snouts, carry on the age-old Viking combat motif.



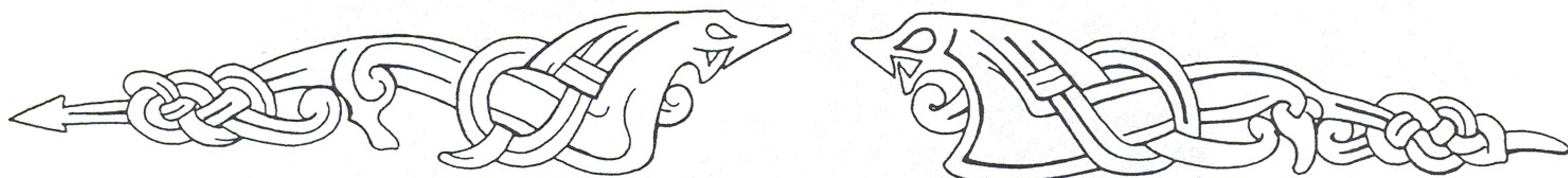


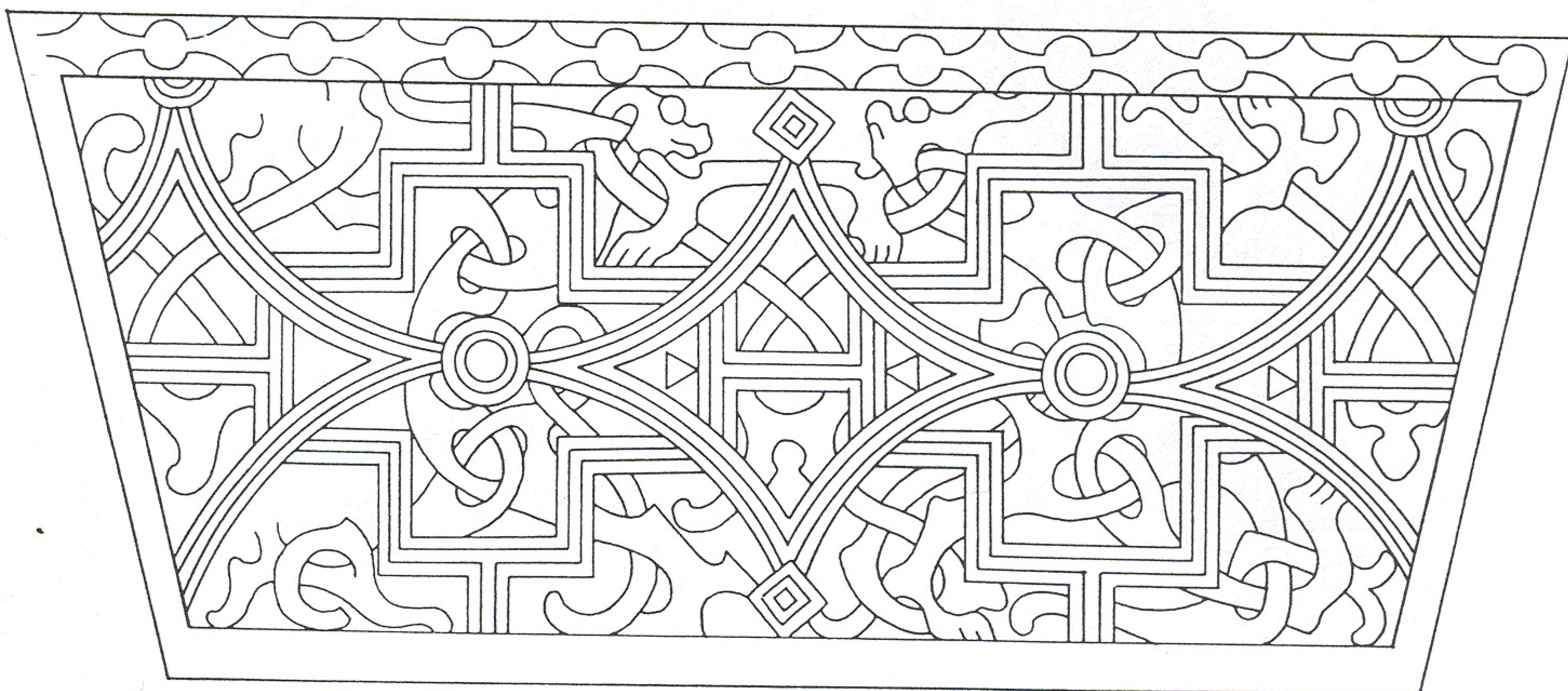


Gilt-bronze harness mounts (Gotland, Sweden).

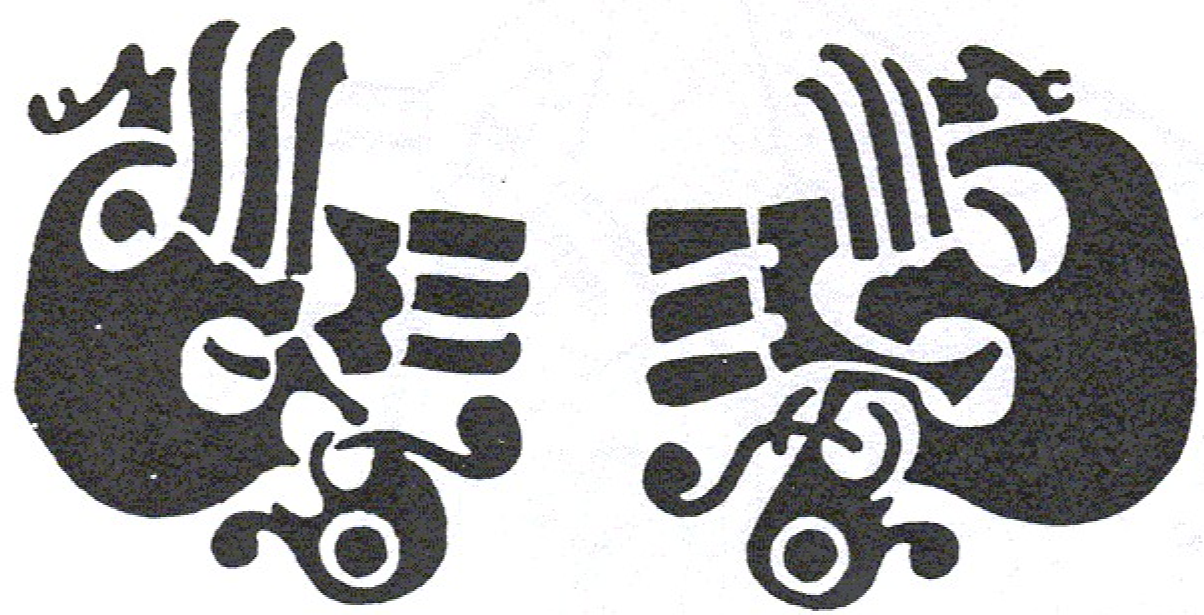
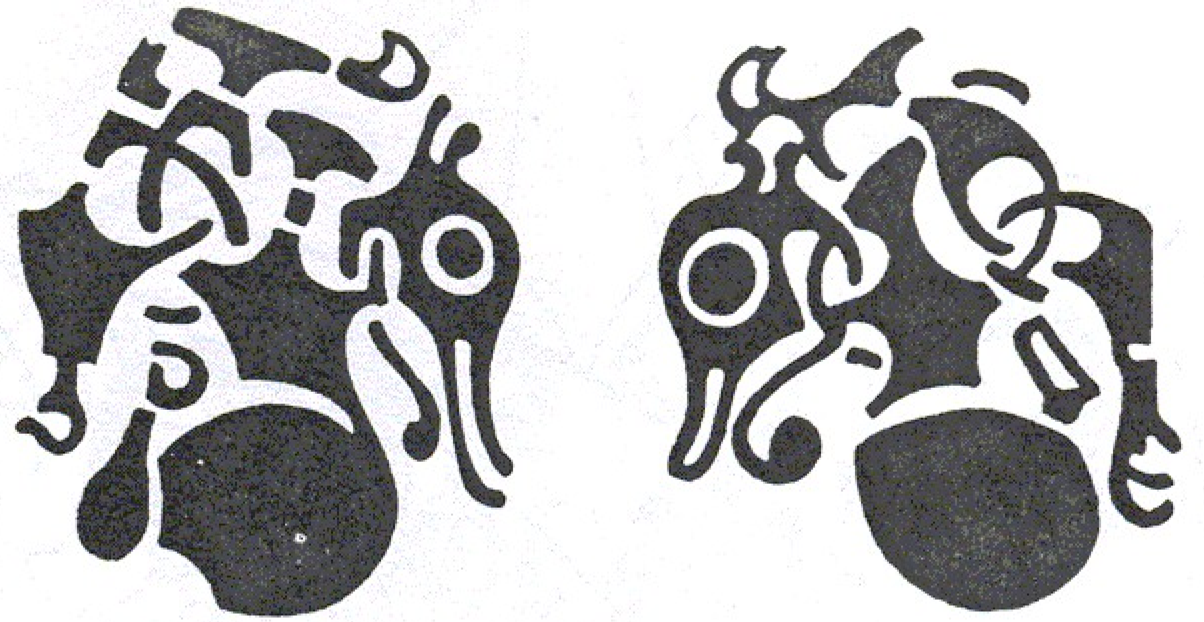
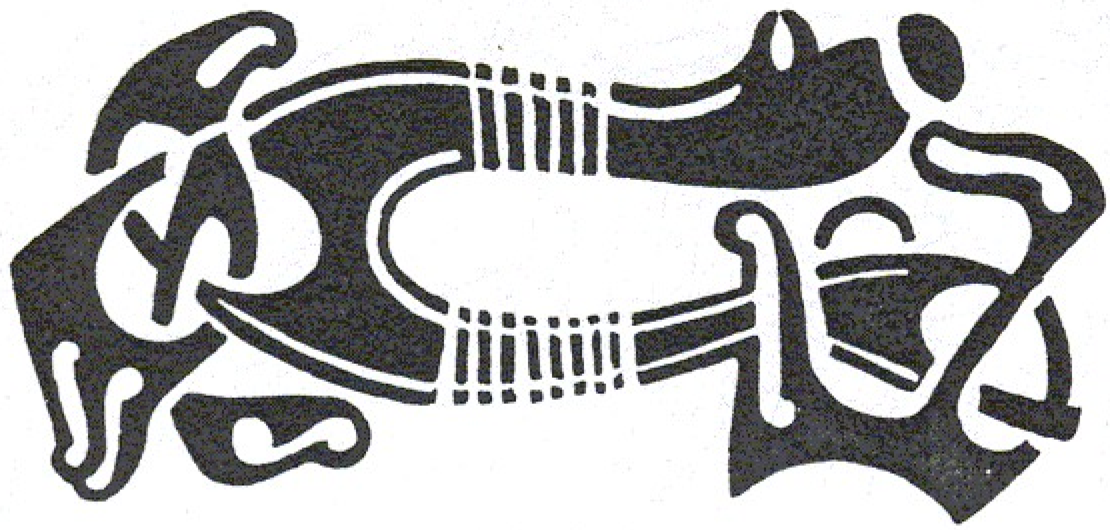





Ornamented bed posts (Oseberg, Norway).

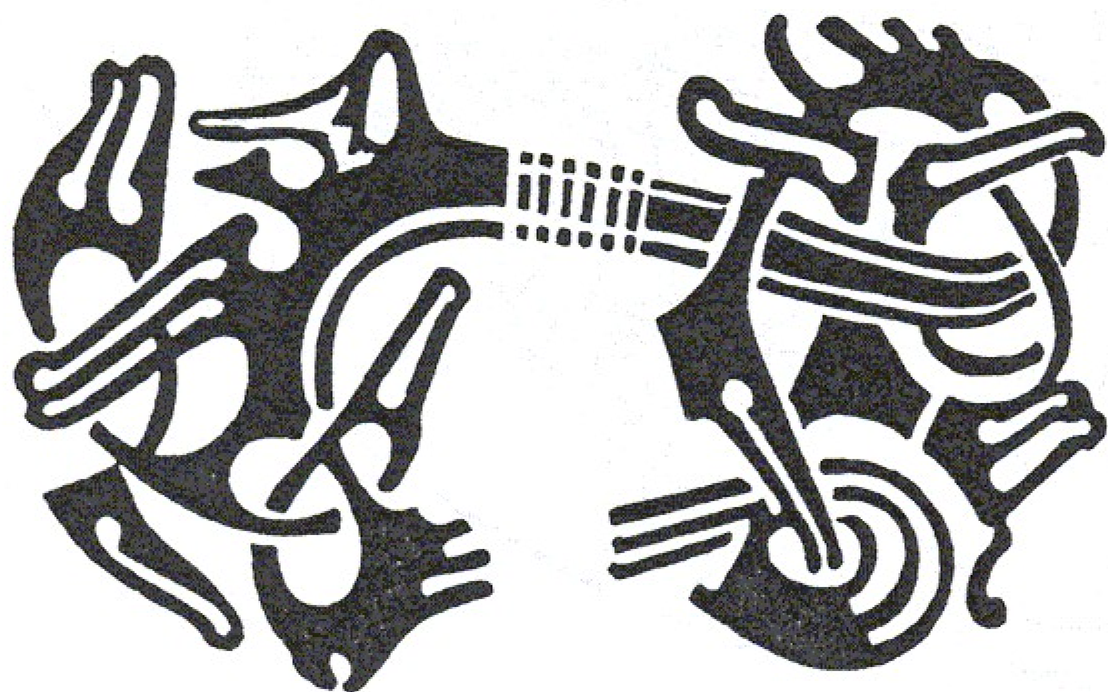


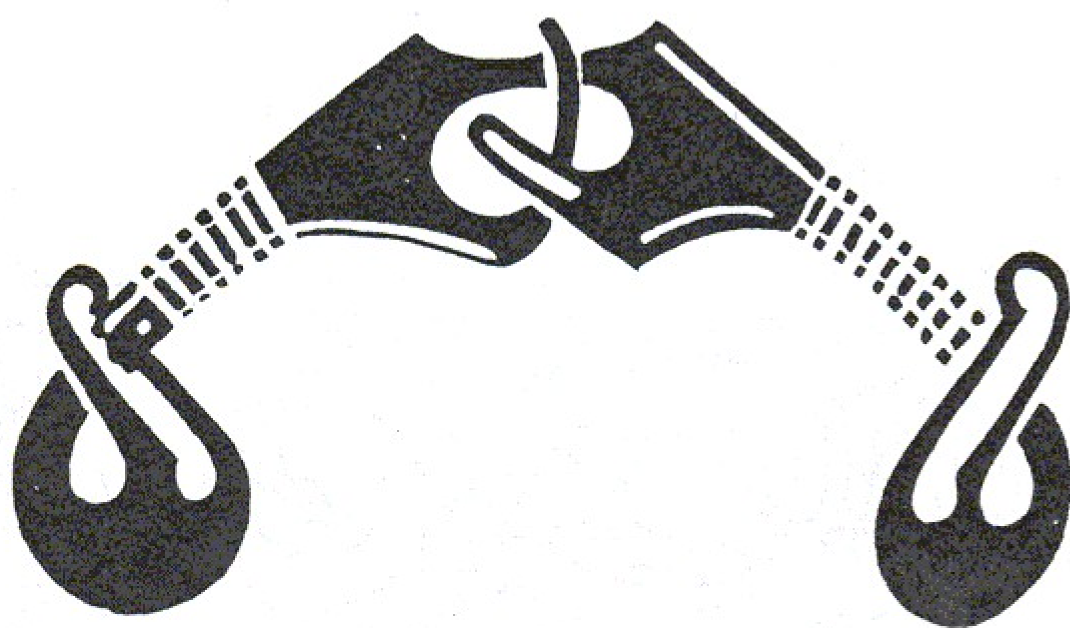


Top: Tapestry (Oseberg, Norway). Center: Ornament from a cross slab (Kirk Michael, Isle of Man, England). Bottom: Ornament from the rear of a sled (Oseberg, Norway).

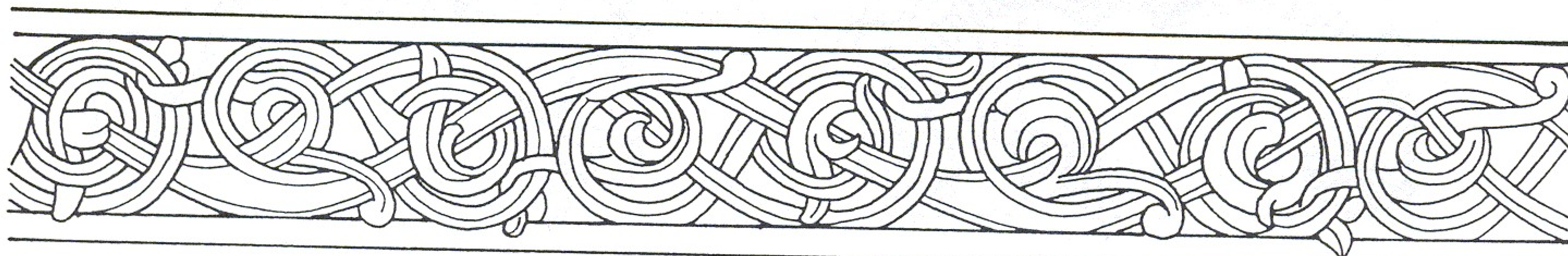











Details of gilt-bronze mounts (Gotland, Sweden).



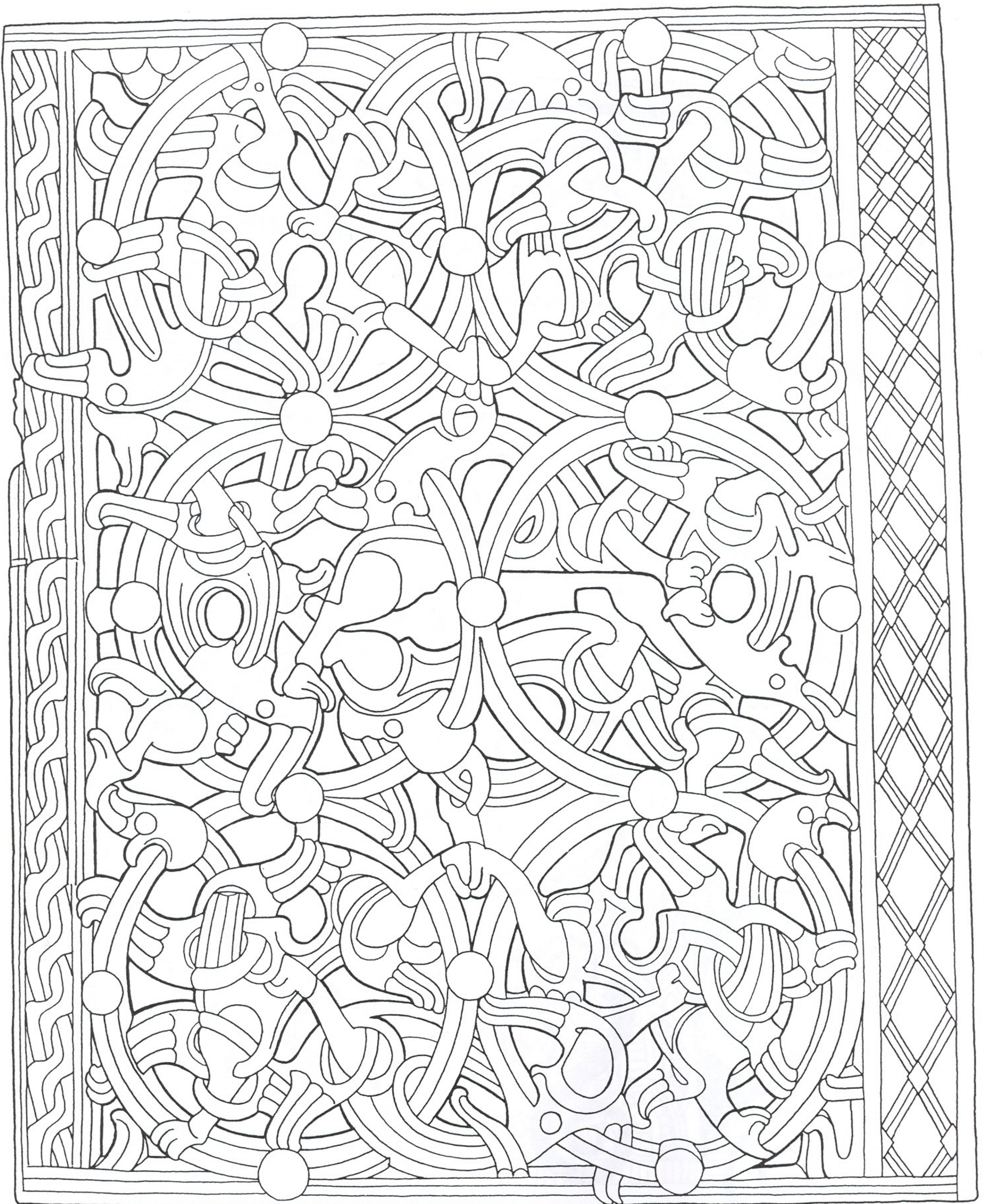
TOP: Lower panel of Valthjofstad Church door (Iceland). BOTTOM: Carving from Thorpe Church (Hallingdal, Norway).



Memorial stone, pre-Viking design (Gotland, Sweden).



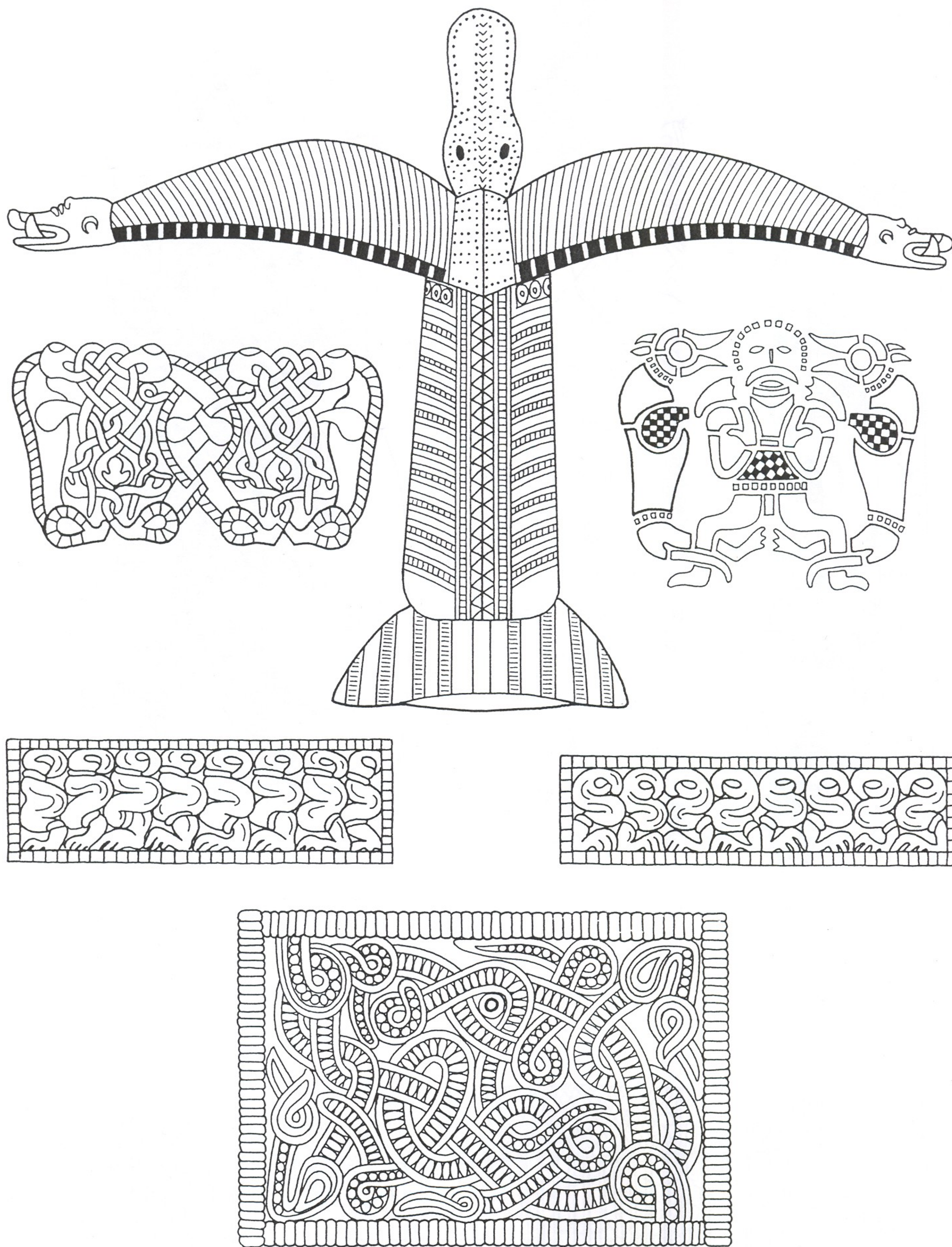
TOP: Rock carving depicting the Sigurd legend (Ramsund, Sweden). BOTTOM: Picture stone depicting the Odin legend (Gotland, Sweden).



Back rest from sled (Oseberg, Norway).

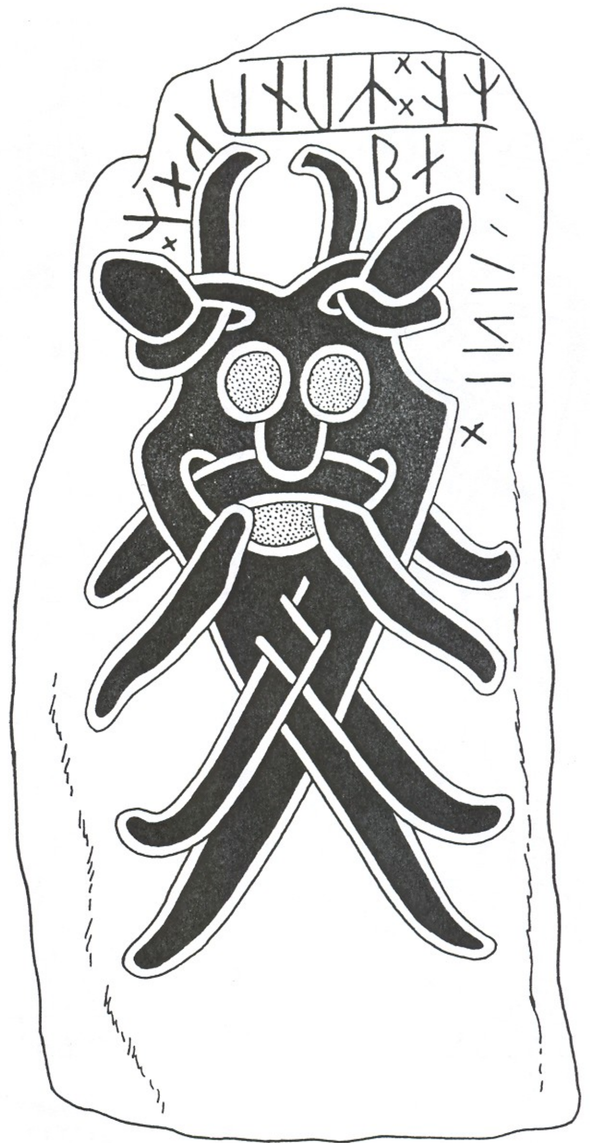


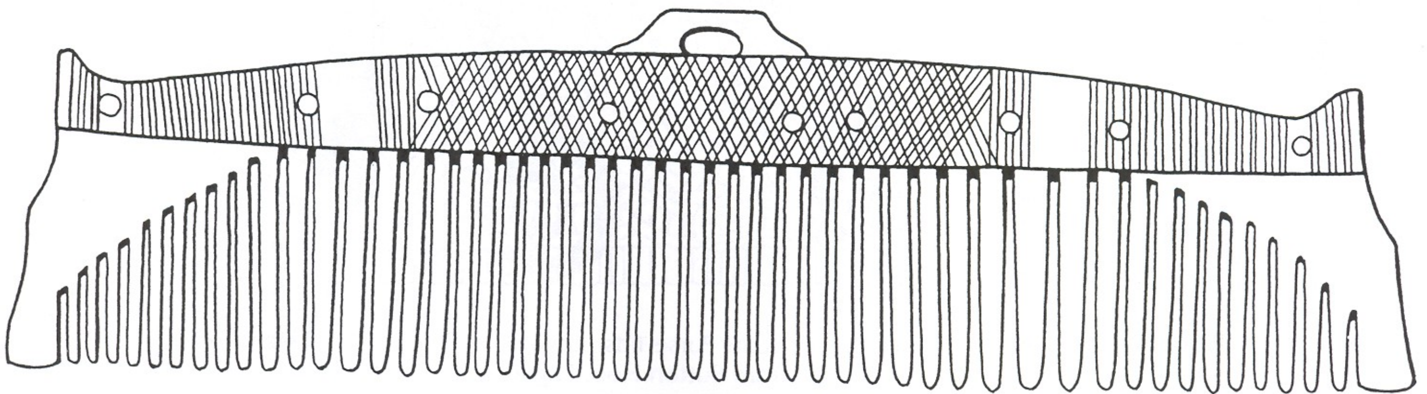
Picture stone from Hablingbo (Gotland, Sweden).



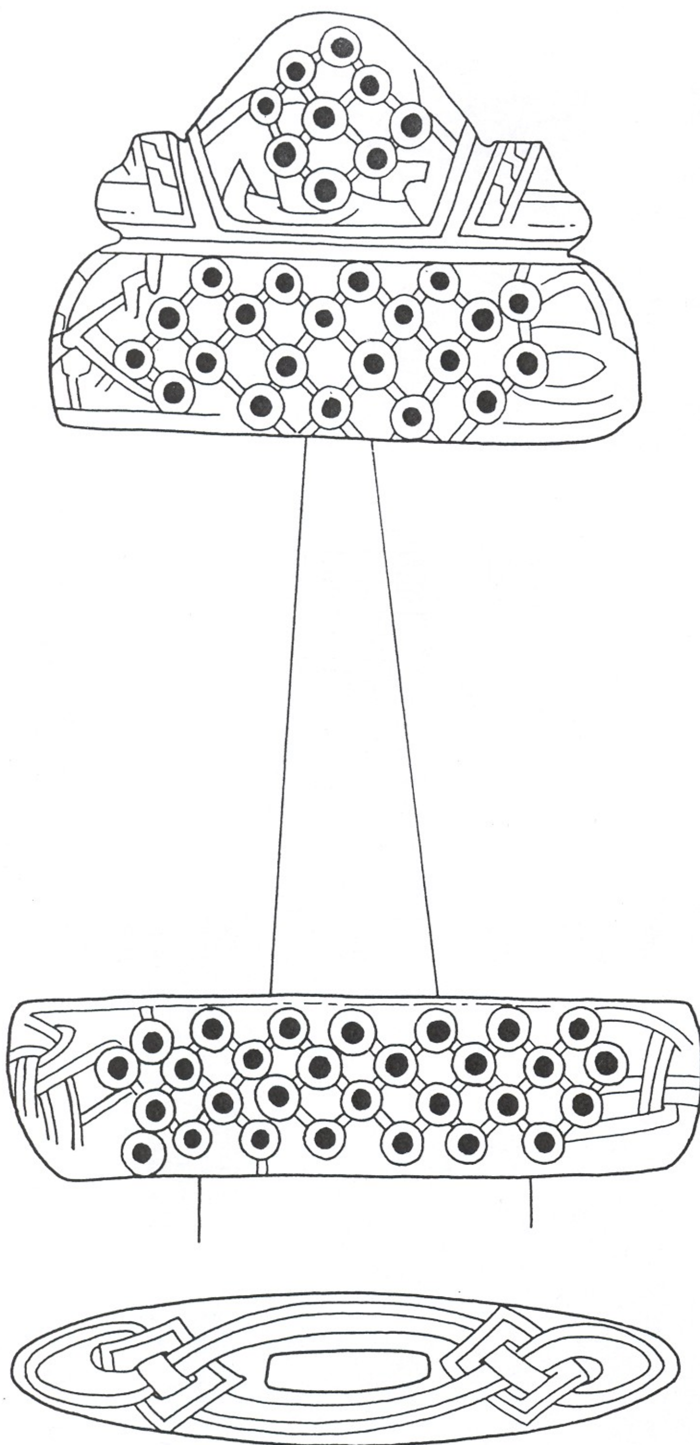
Top: Visor from helmet. Upper left & right: Purse lids. Lower left & right: Motifs from cup rims. Bottom: Plate from helmet. (All from Sutton Hoo, England).

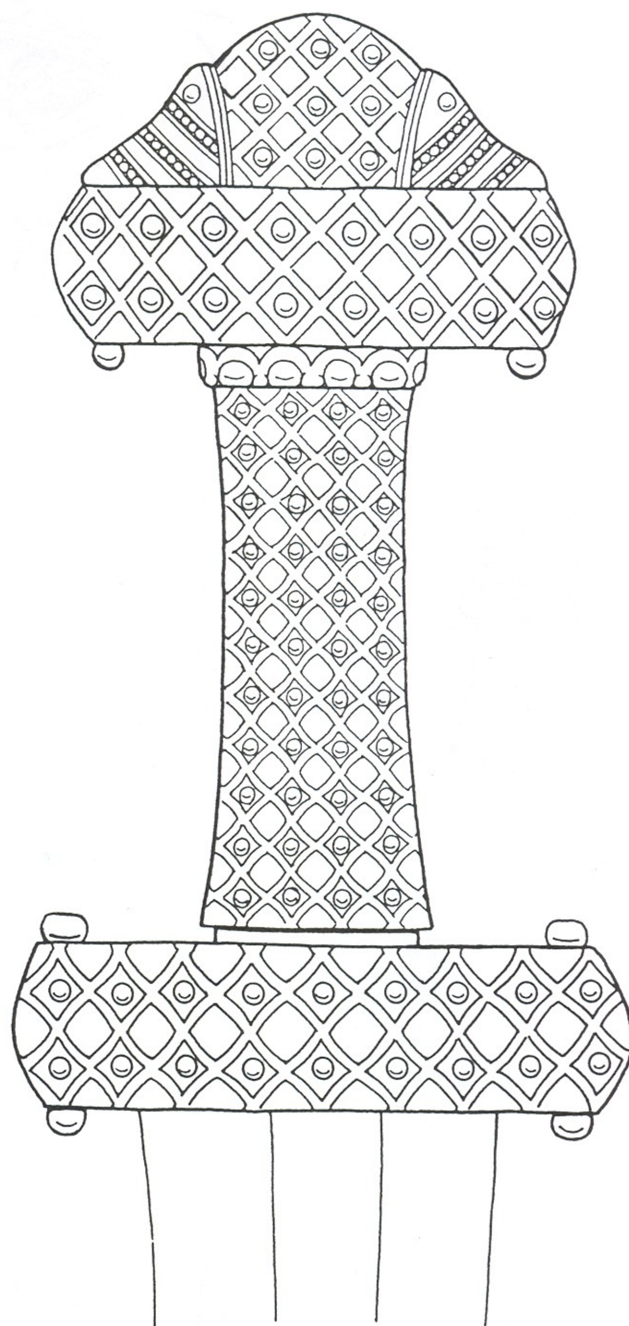


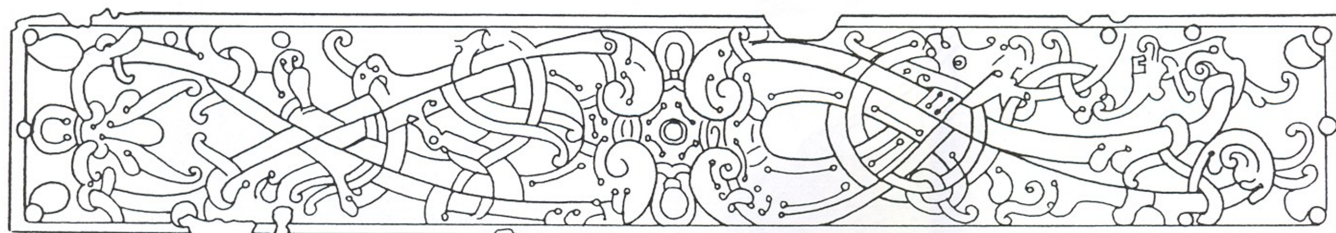




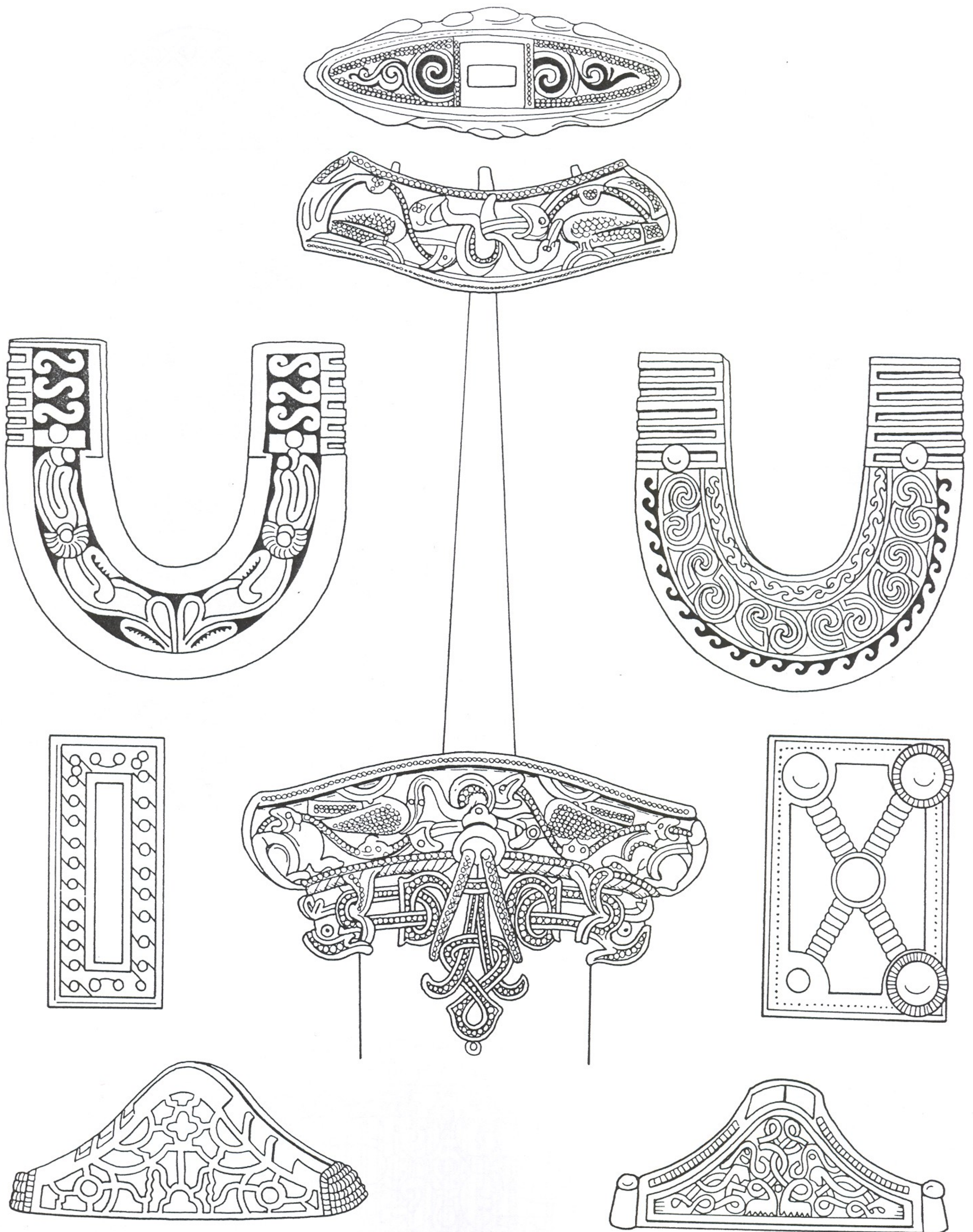
TOP LEFT: Picture stone (Öland, Sweden). TOP RIGHT: Picture stone (Århus, Denmark). BOTTOM: Comb (Tuna, Uppland, Sweden).



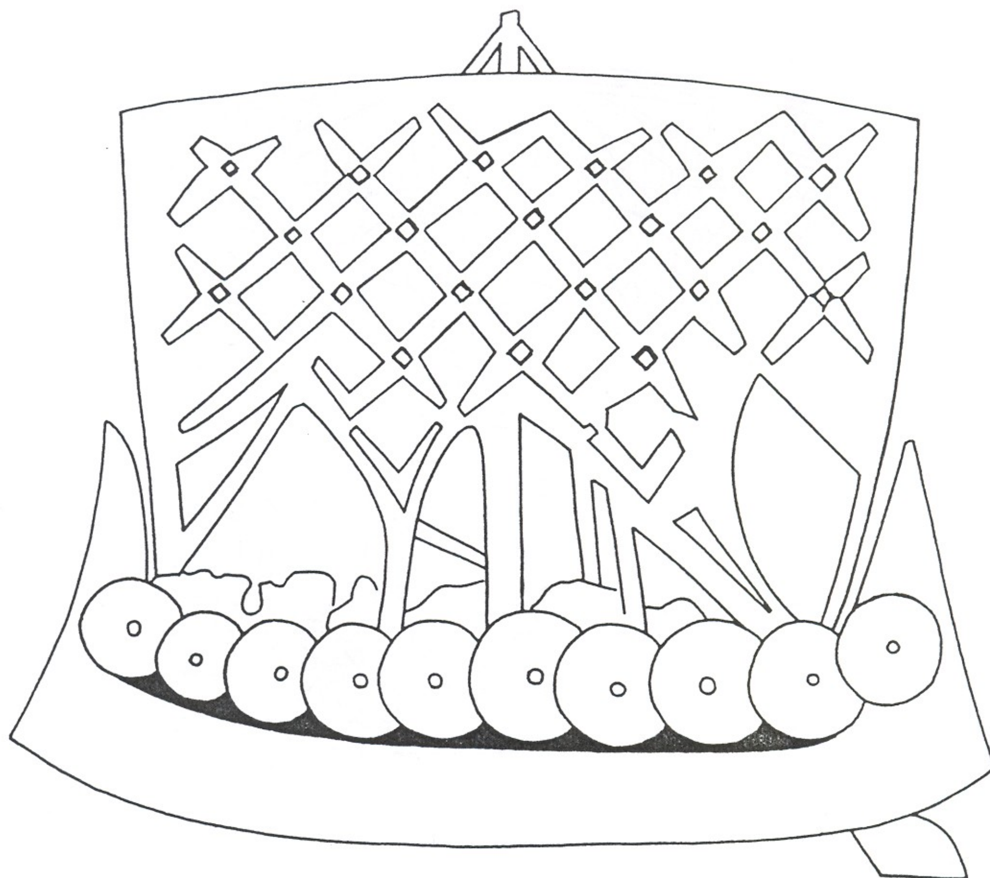


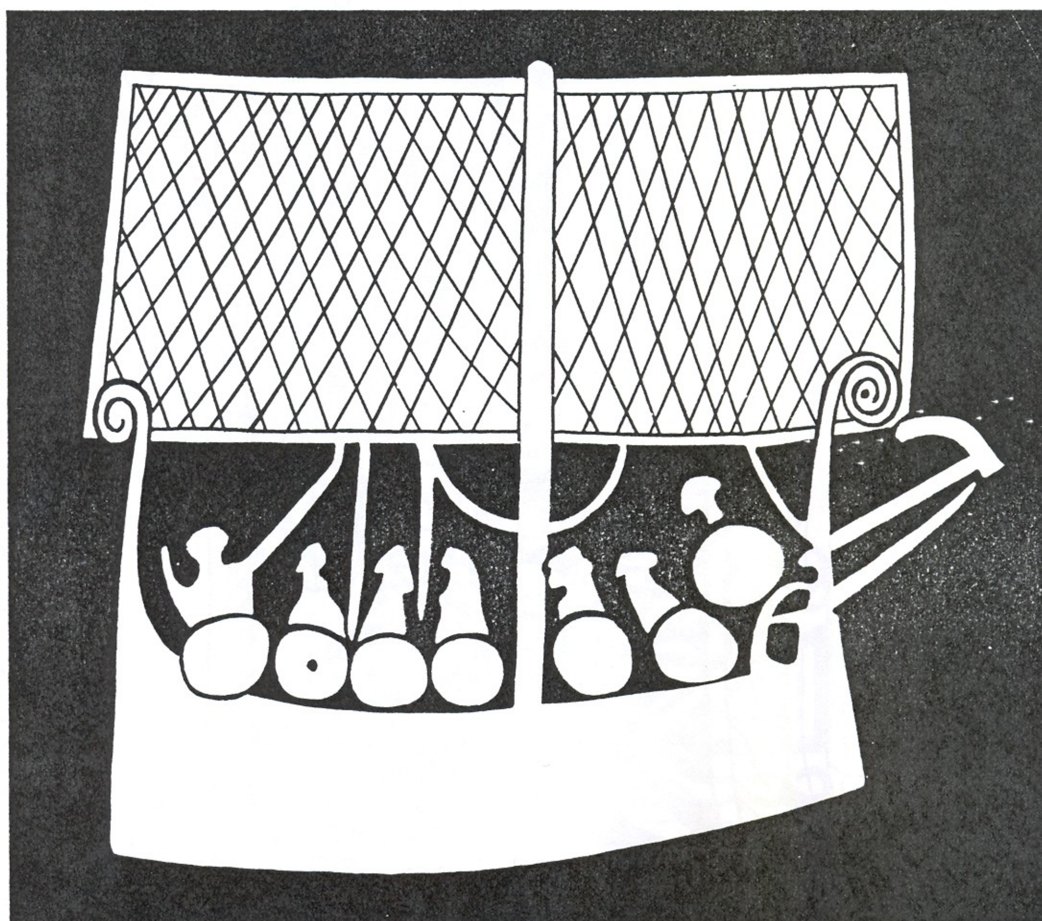


TOP RIGHT & LEFT: Hilts of two double-edged swords (Norway). BOTTOM: Bronze strap with engraving in Ringerike style.

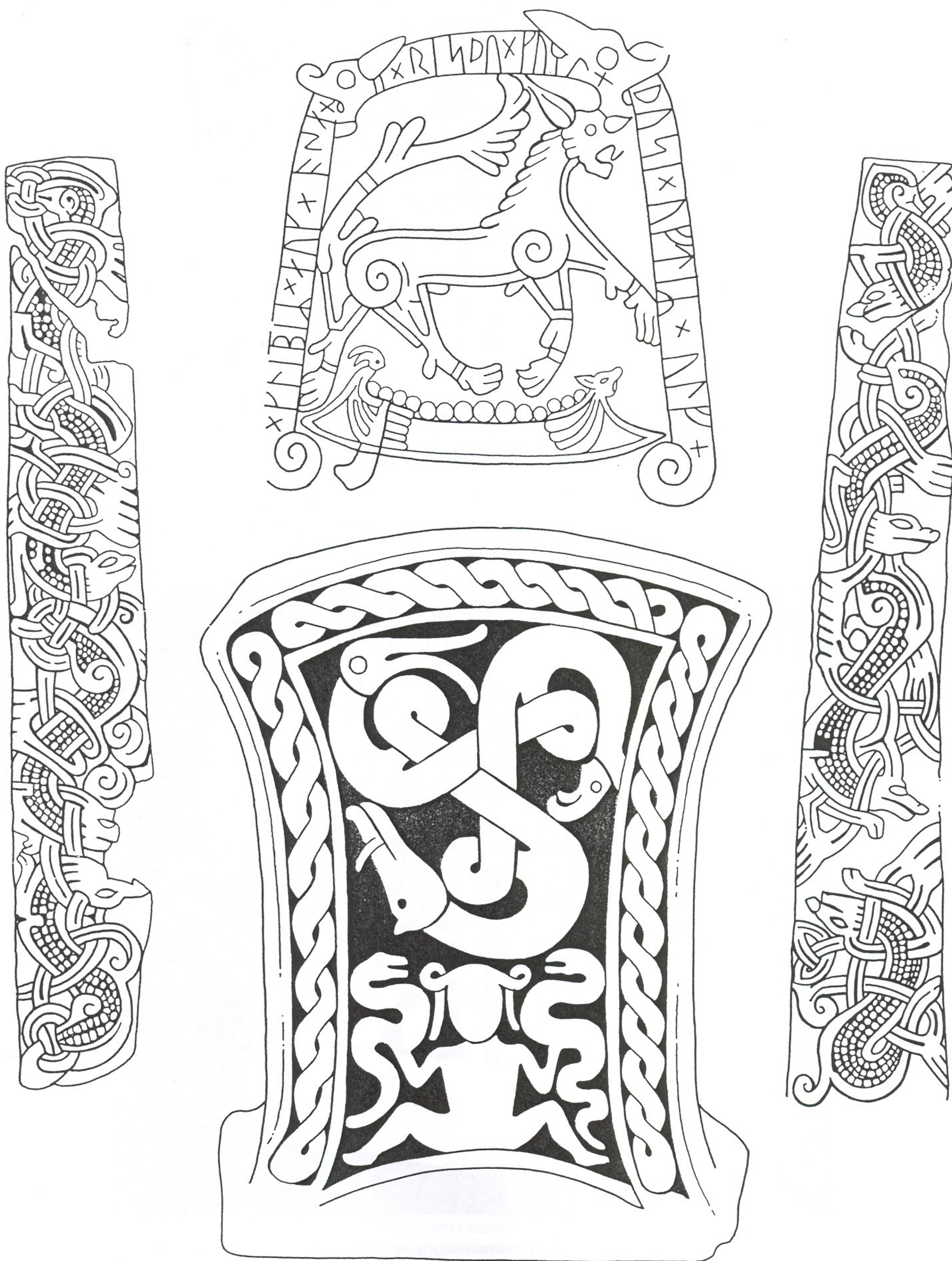


Center: Hilt of sword (Scania, Sweden). Upper right & left: Silver scabbard ornament (Scania, Sweden). Center left: Rectangular silver ornament for scabbard (Norway). Center right: Bronze ornament with round garnets (Gotland, Sweden). Bottom left: Sword pommel (Bohuslän, Sweden). Bottom right: Sword pommel (Gotland, Sweden).

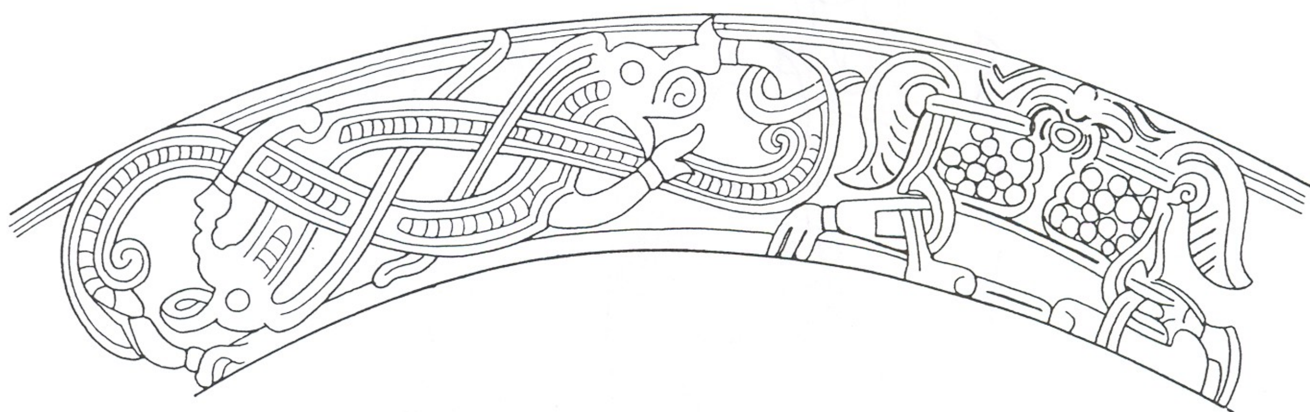




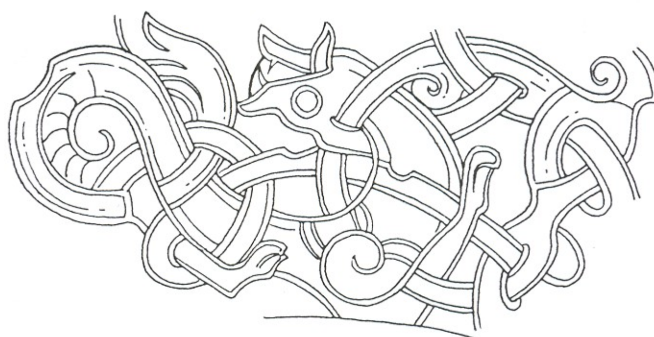
Two Viking ships from picture stones (Gotland, Sweden).



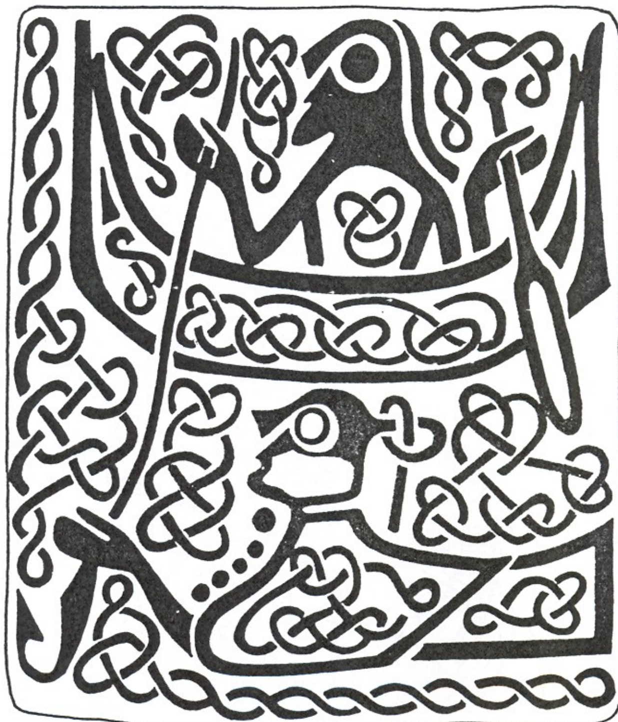
TOP: Design on a rune stone (Skåne, Sweden). BOTTOM: Picture stone (Gotland, Sweden). LEFT & RIGHT: Ornament from Thorleif's stone (Kirk Braddan, Isle of Man, England).





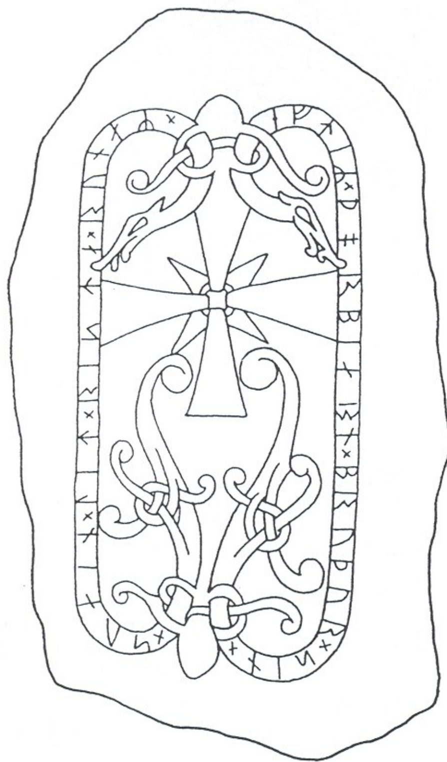
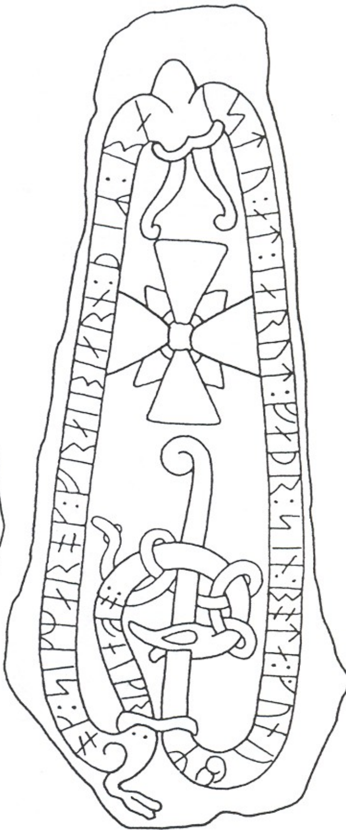
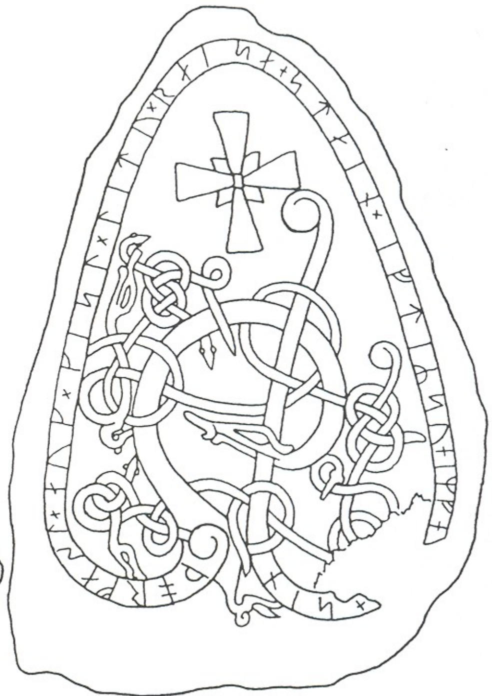
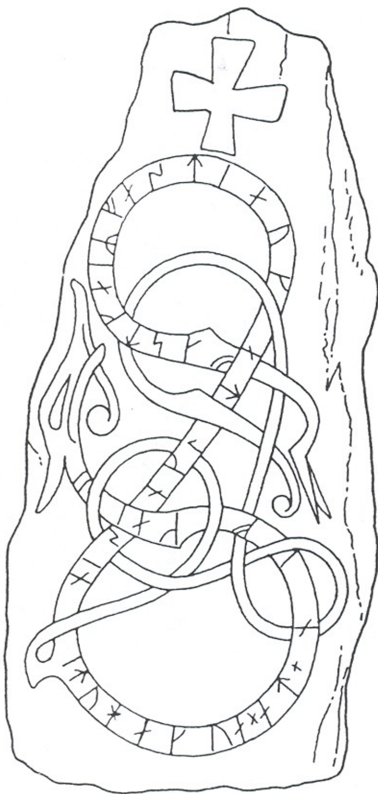
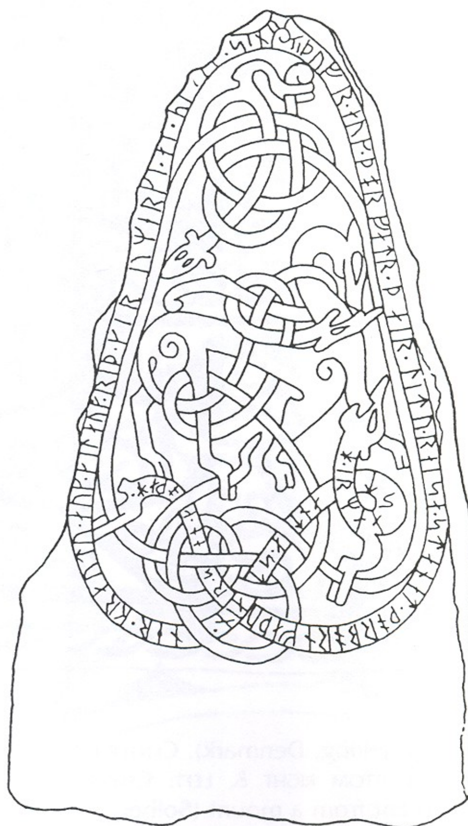
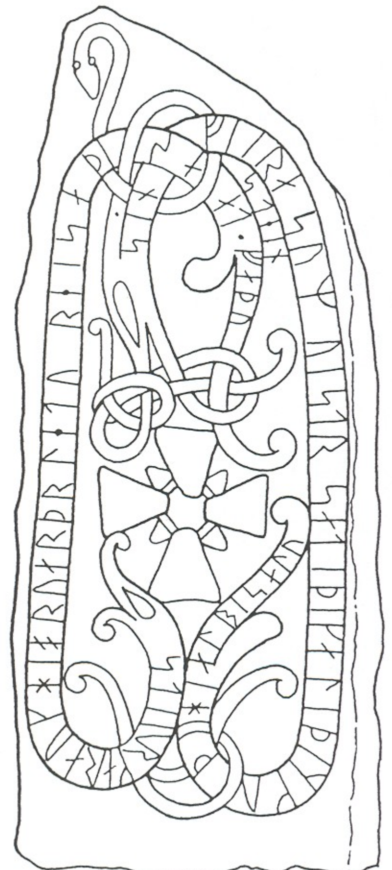




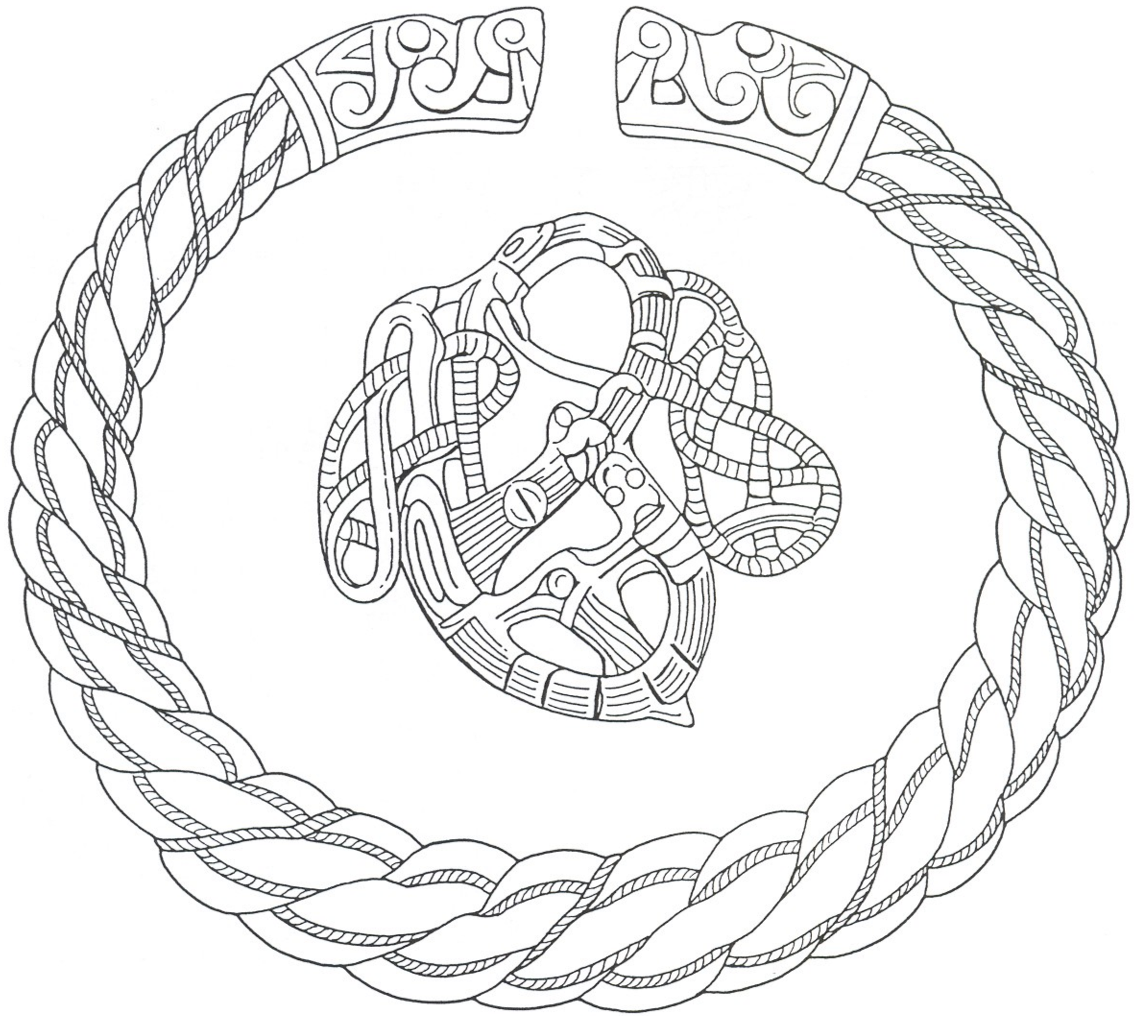




TOP: Ornament from a silver cup (Jelling, Denmark). CENTER RIGHT: Ornament from penannular brooches (Skaill, Orkney). BOTTOM RIGHT & LEFT: Cross shaft (Collingham, Yorkshire, England). BOTTOM CENTER: Ornament from a mount (Solberga, Östergötland, Sweden).

Six stones with runic inscriptions (Uppland, Sweden).





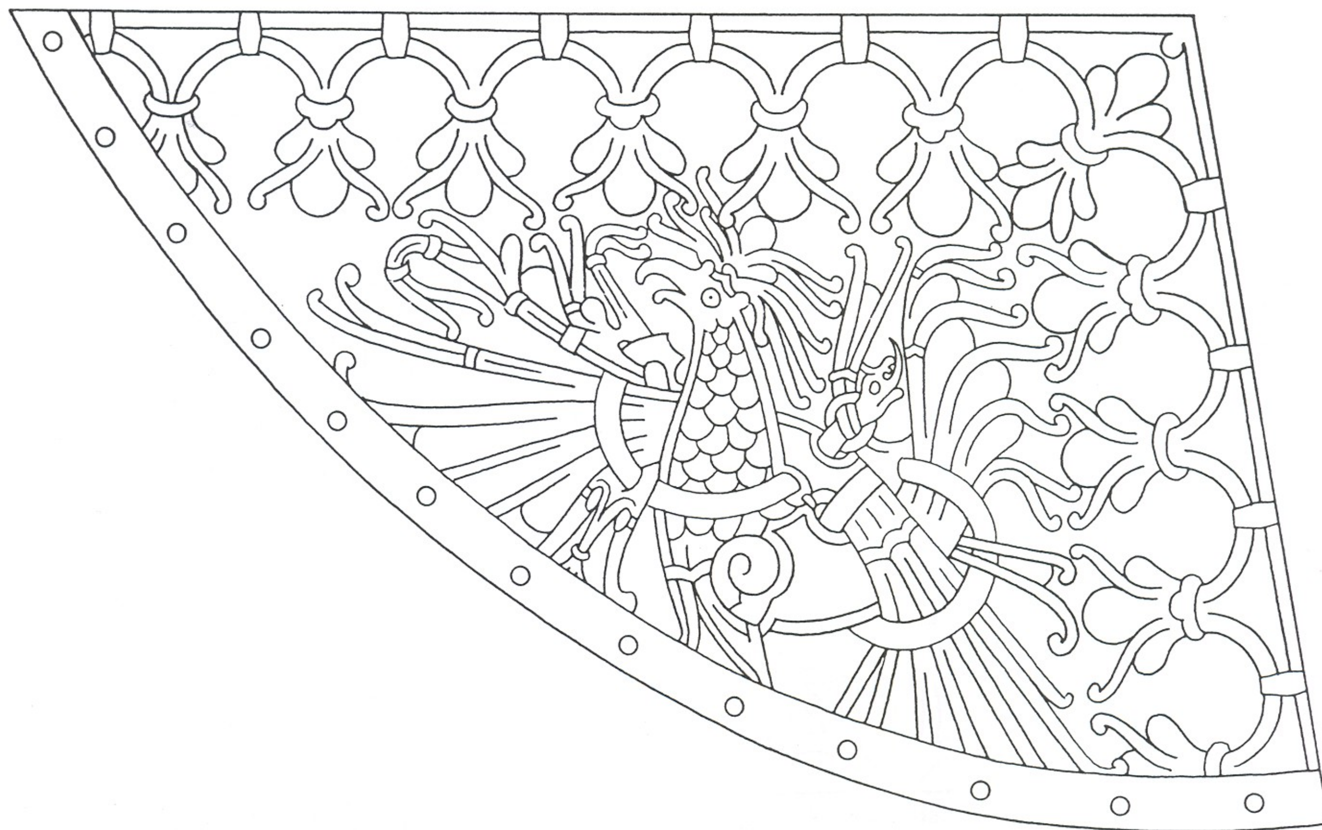
TOP: Eleventh-century arm ring (Gotland, Sweden). TOP CENTER: Urnes-style brooch (Norway).
BOTTOM: Pendants from the Vårby hoard (Sweden).



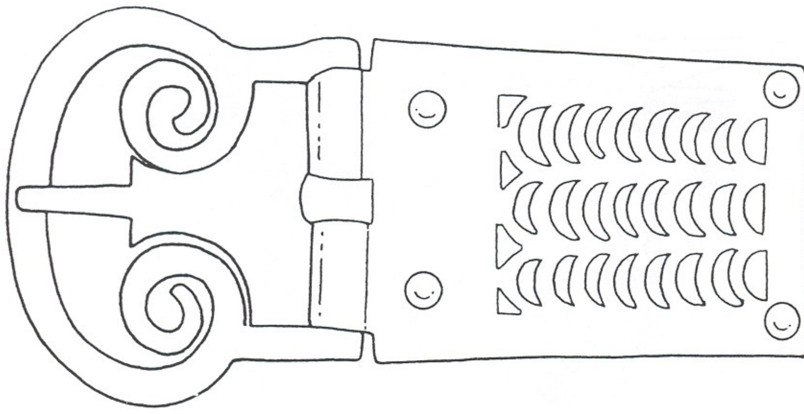
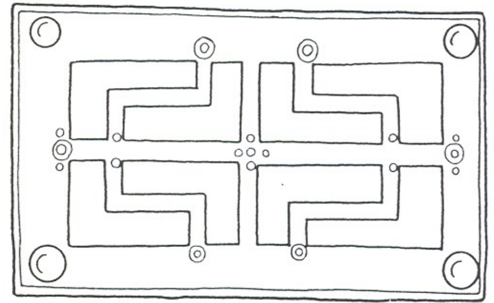
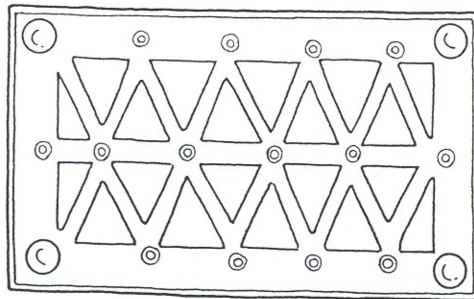
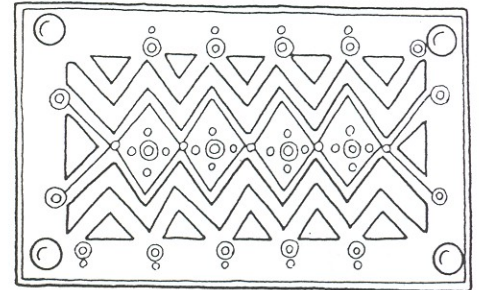
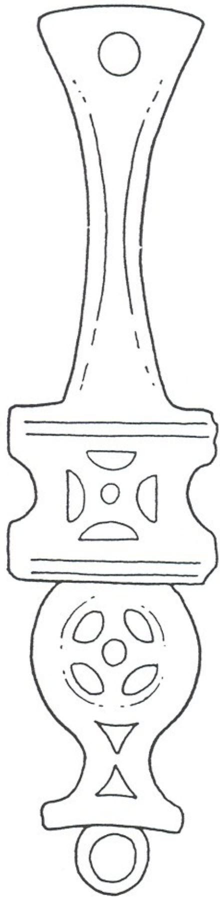
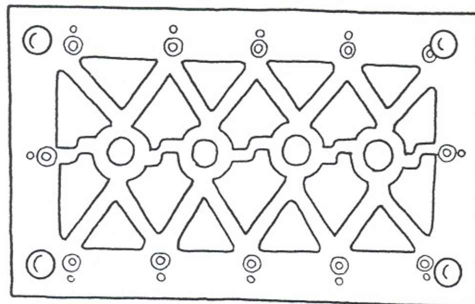
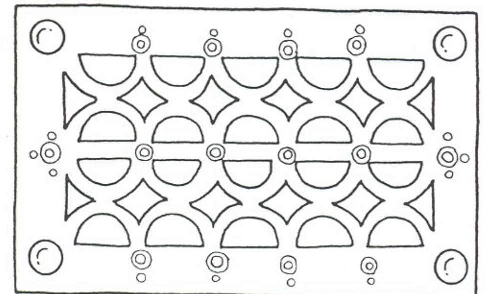
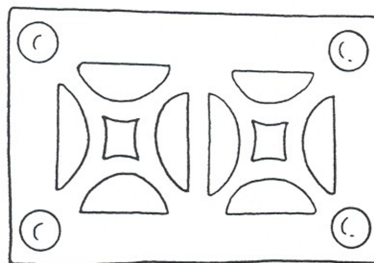
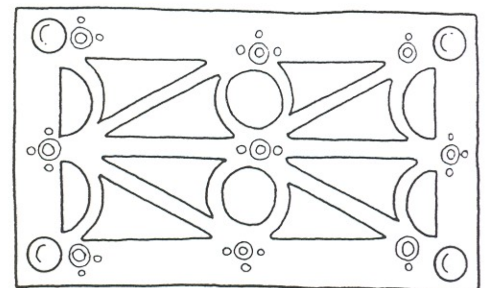
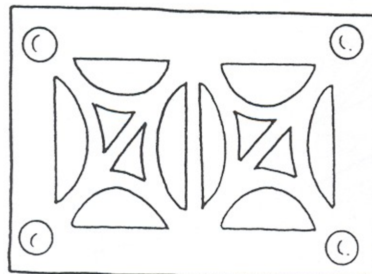
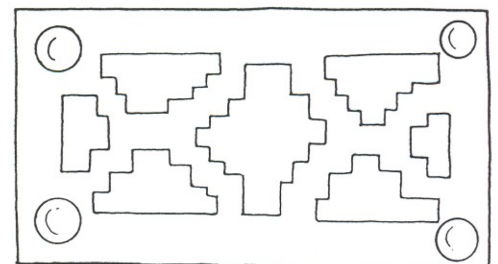


Ornaments from a gilt-bronze weathervane (Källunge, Gotland, Sweden).

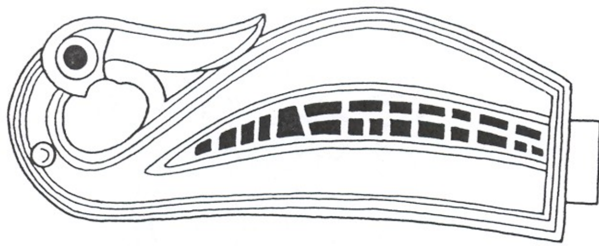
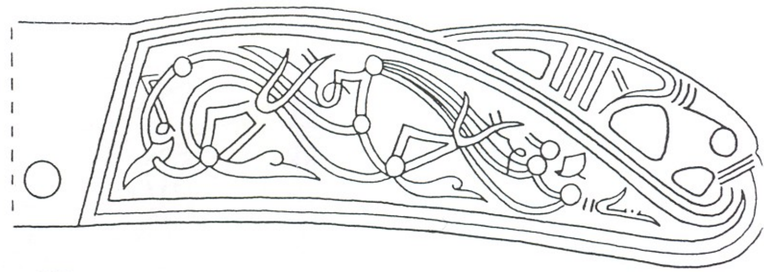
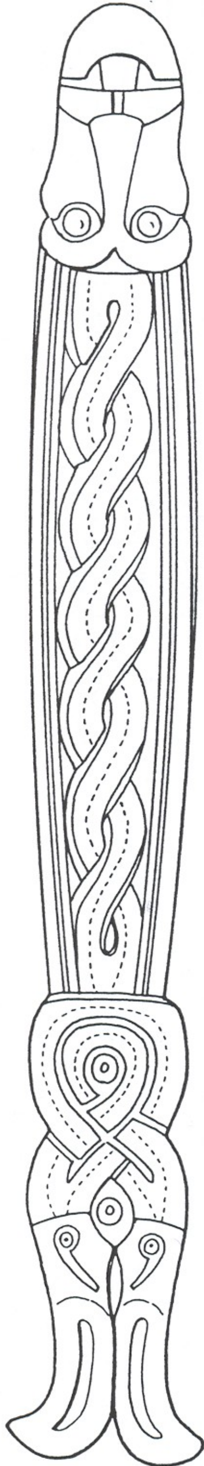
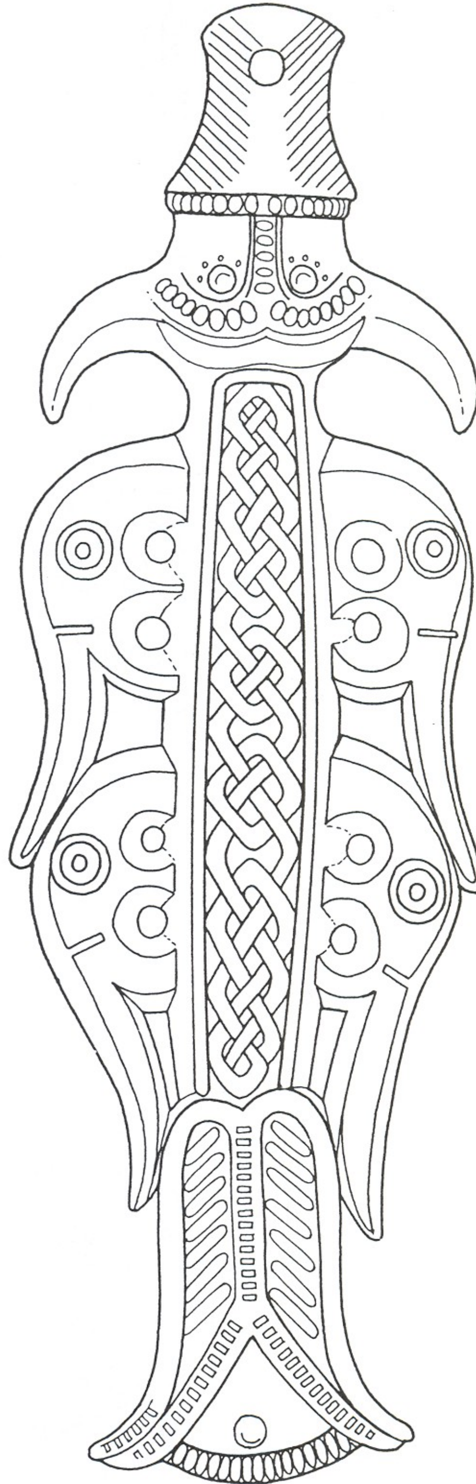
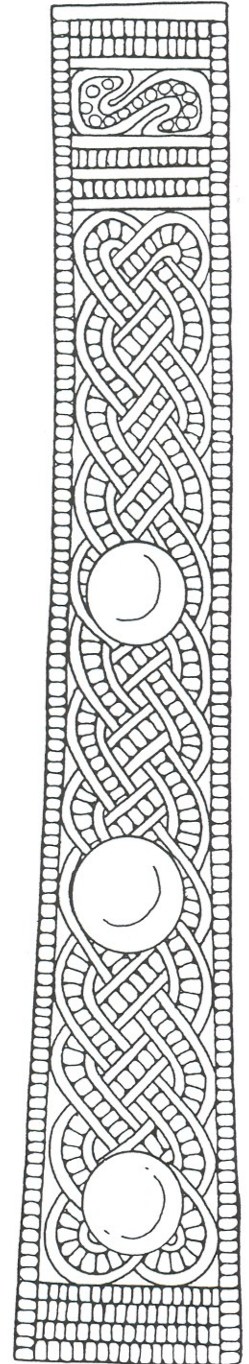




Eleventh-century Viking ship weathervane (Heggen, Norway).

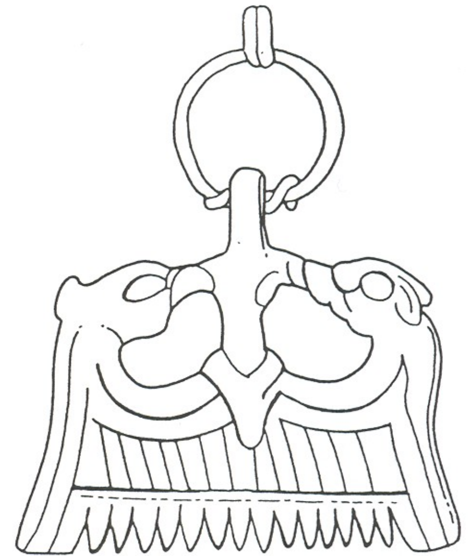












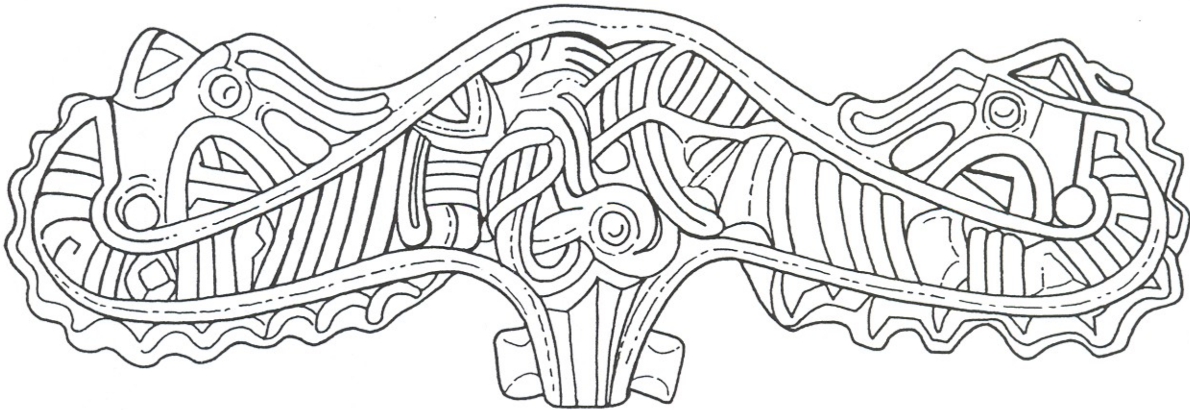
Bronze openwork pieces (All from Gotland, Sweden except for bottom right corner lower southern mainland, Sweden).

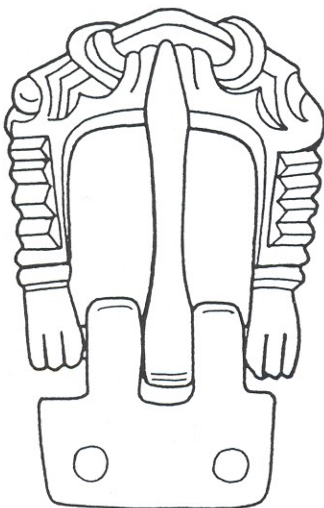






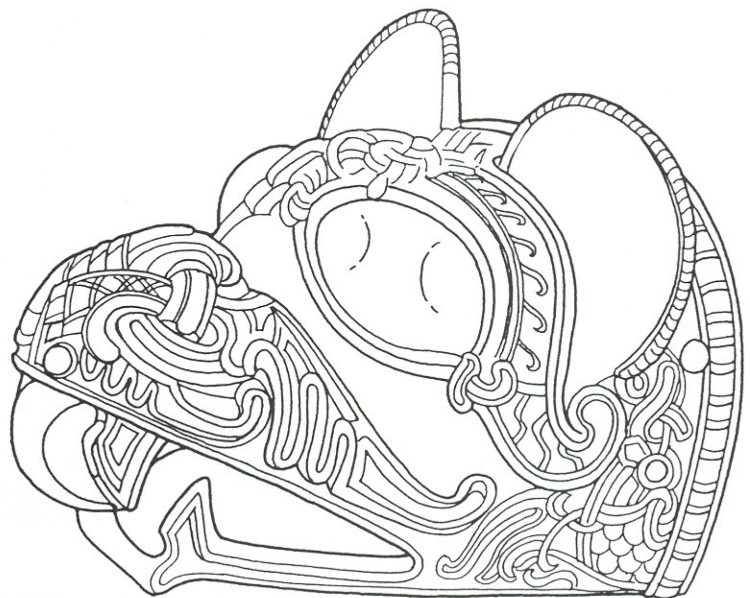
TOP LEFT: Helm visor (Valsgärde, Sweden). TOP RIGHT: Helm visor (Gotland, Sweden). BOTTOM LEFT & CENTER: Ornaments on sword scabbard (Valsgärde, Sweden). BOTTOM RIGHT: Shield ornament (Valsgärde, Sweden).







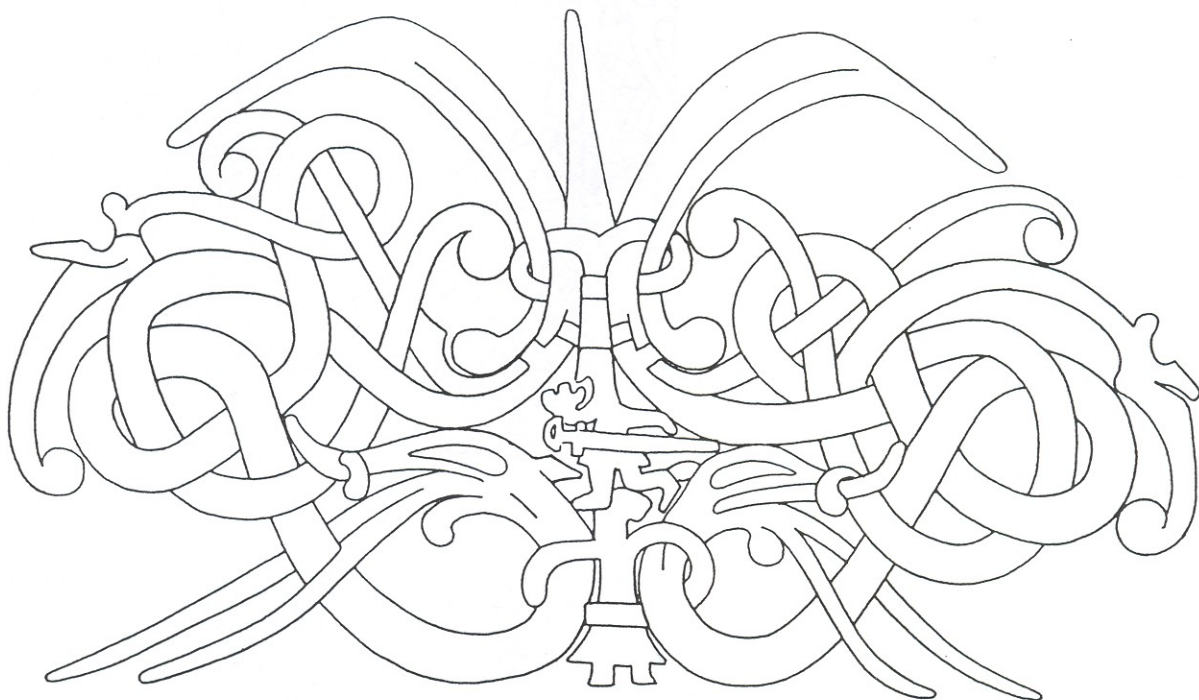


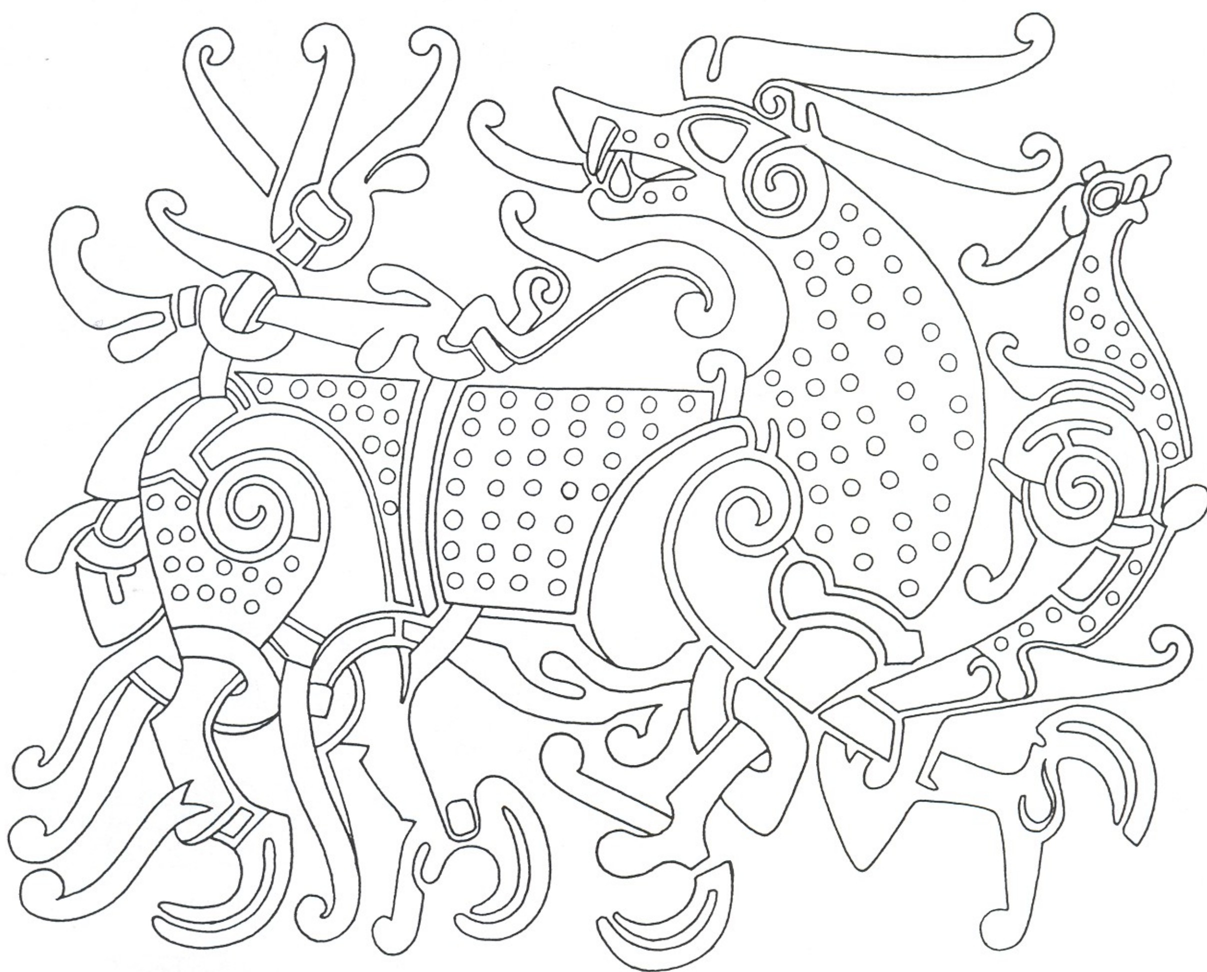


TOP LEFT: Ornament from horse collar (Norway). TOP RIGHT: Bronze comb (Lake Mälar, Sweden). CENTER: Piece of gilt-bronze horse bit (Borre, Norway). BOTTOM RIGHT: Ornament from harness bow (Søllestad, Denmark). BOTTOM LEFT: Bronze buckle (Gokstad, Norway).

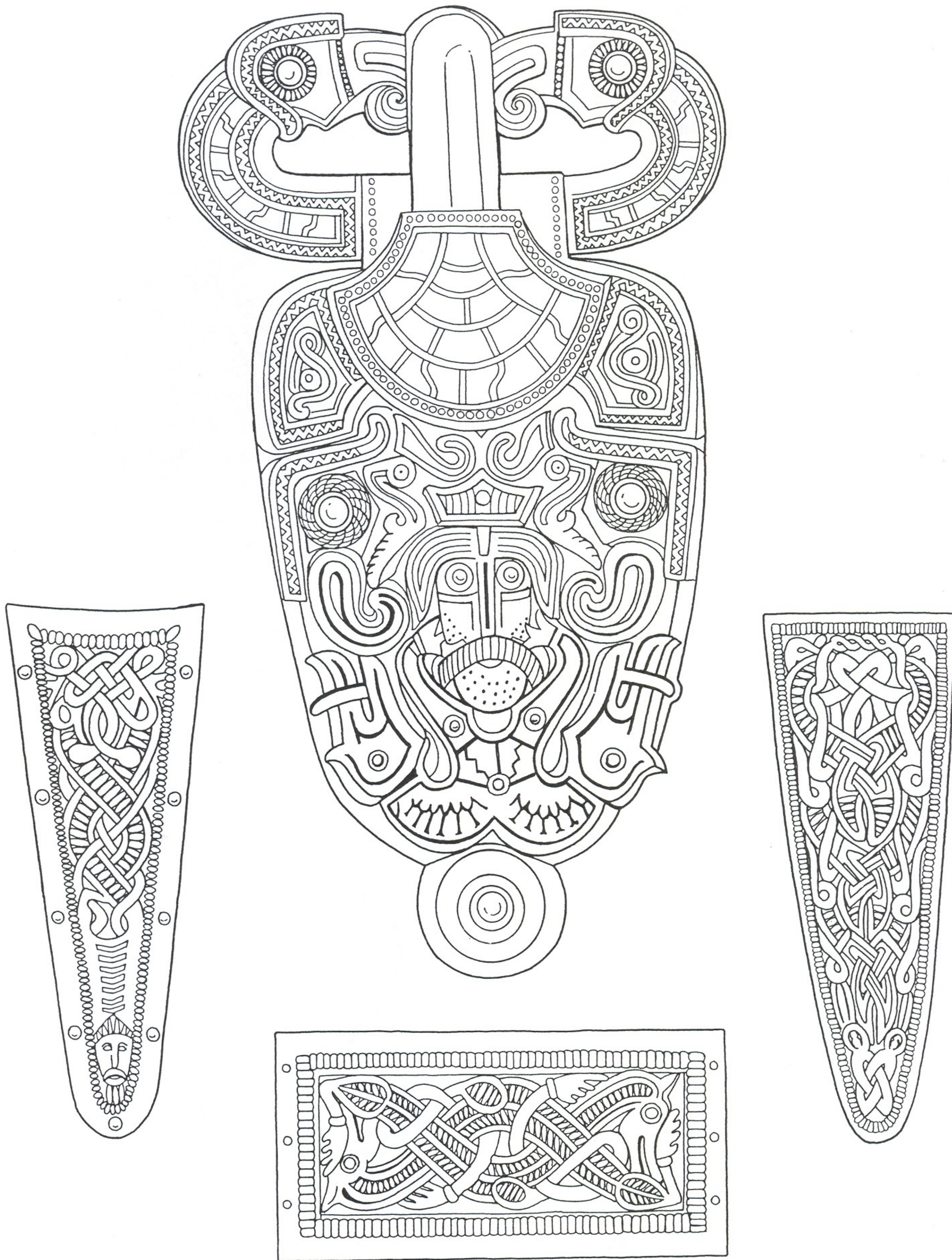


*Ivory Carvings*: TOP: Bone sleeve (Nordmøre, Norway). CENTER: Panels of Bamberg Casket (Bamberg, Germany, Norwegian origin). BOTTOM: Panels of Cammin Casket (Pomerania, formerly Germany, Norwegian origin).

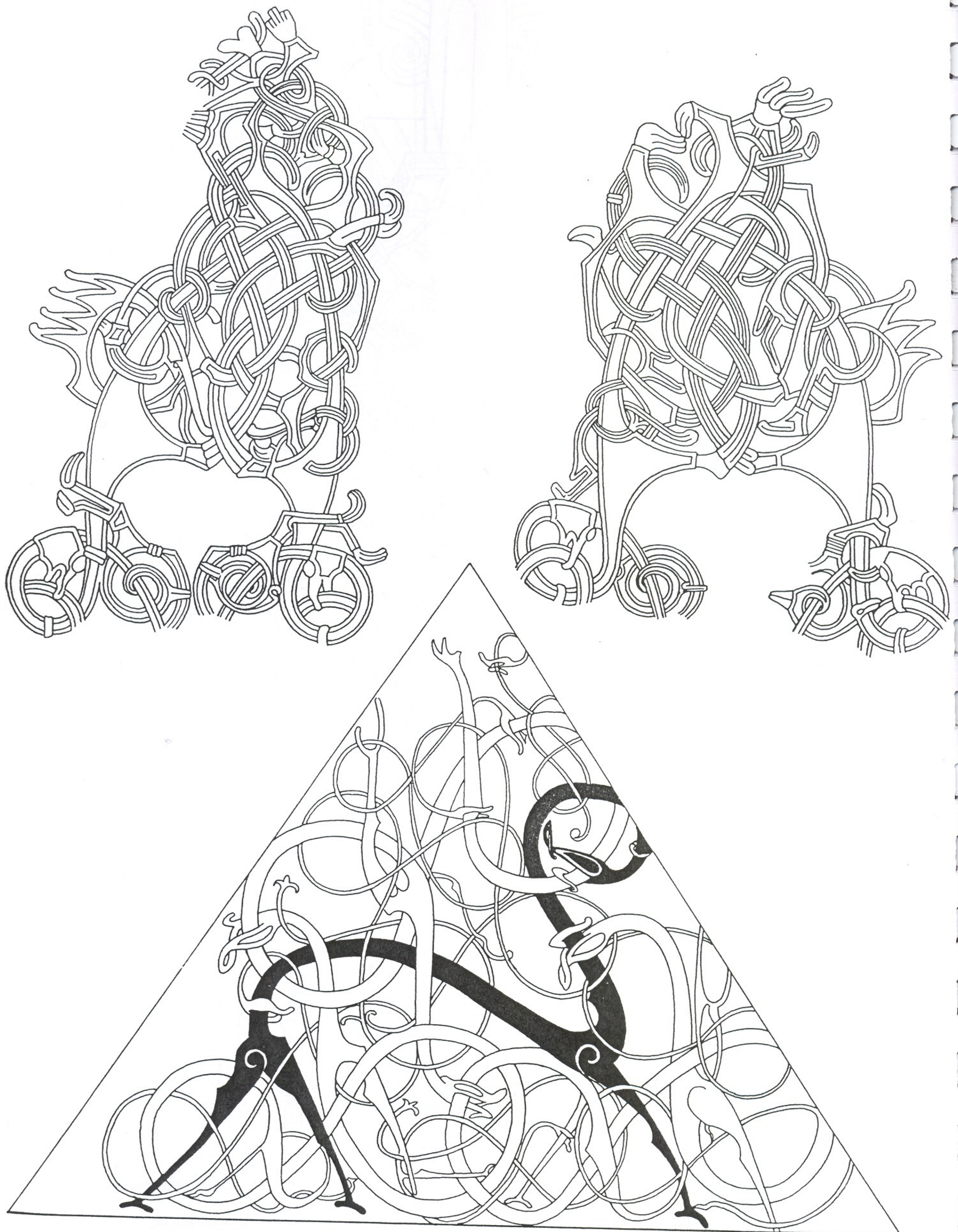




TOP: Design on a stone monument depicting Odin devoured by the wolf Fenrir (Kirk Andreas, Isle of Man, England). BOTTOM: Design on a Viking rune stone (St. Paul's Churchyard, London).

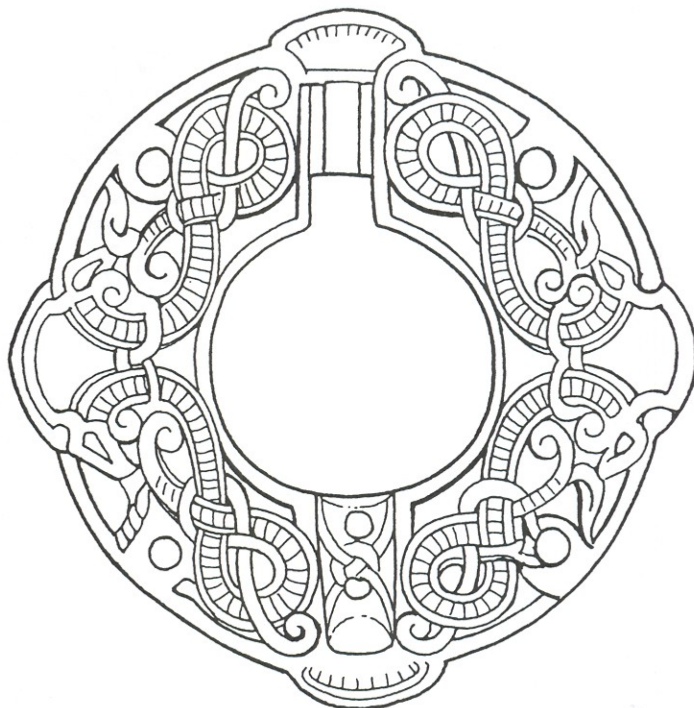


Center top: Brooch, c. 600 (Hedemark, Norway). Right, left & bottom: Silver-gilt mounts (Sutton Hoo, England).



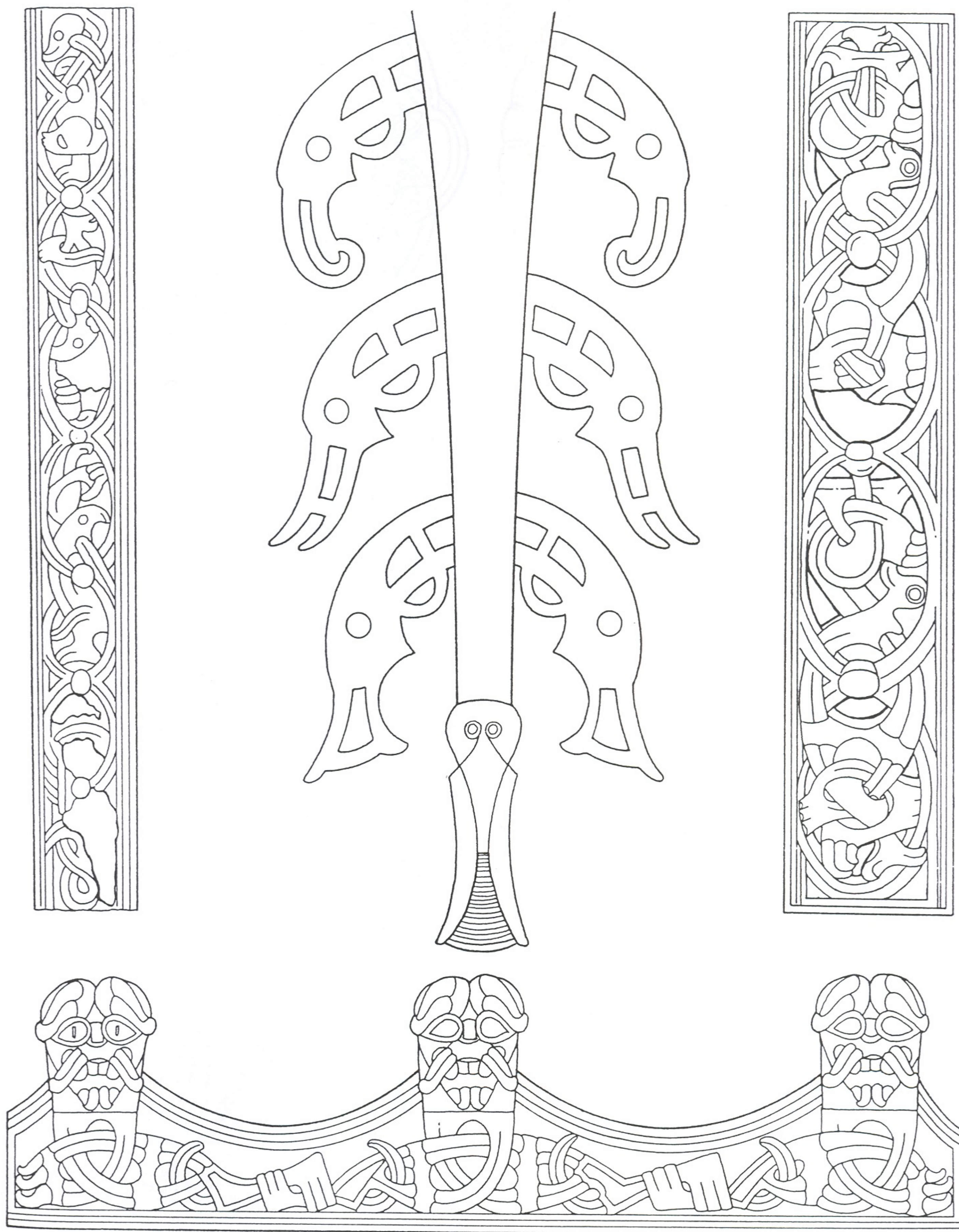
Top: Detail of wood carving, c. 800 (Oseberg , Norway). Bottom: Gable end of Urnes Church (Norway).







TOP LEFT: Urnes-style gilt-bronze brooch (Pitney, Somerset, England). TOP RIGHT: Base plate of drum brooch (Tändgarve, Sweden). BOTTOM: Rune stone (Gotland, Sweden).



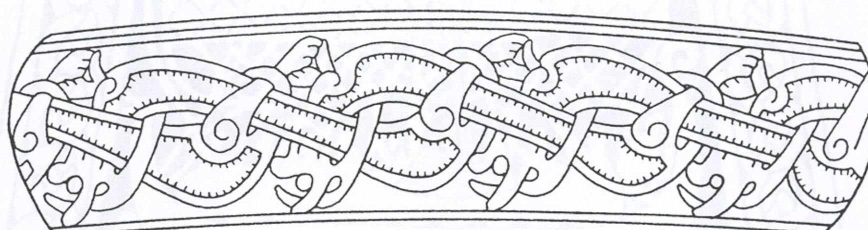
RIGHT, LEFT & BOTTOM: Carved wood sled decorations (Oseberg, Norway). CENTER: Shield mounting (Valsgärde, Sweden).

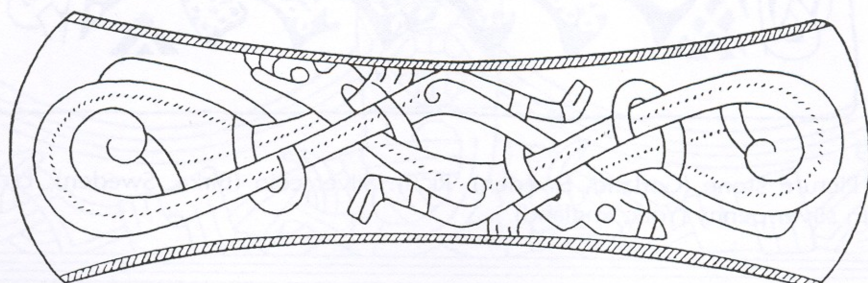


CENTER: Picture stone (Gotland, Sweden). RIGHT: Silver coin (Birka, Sweden). LEFT: Viking Kingdom silver penny (York, England).









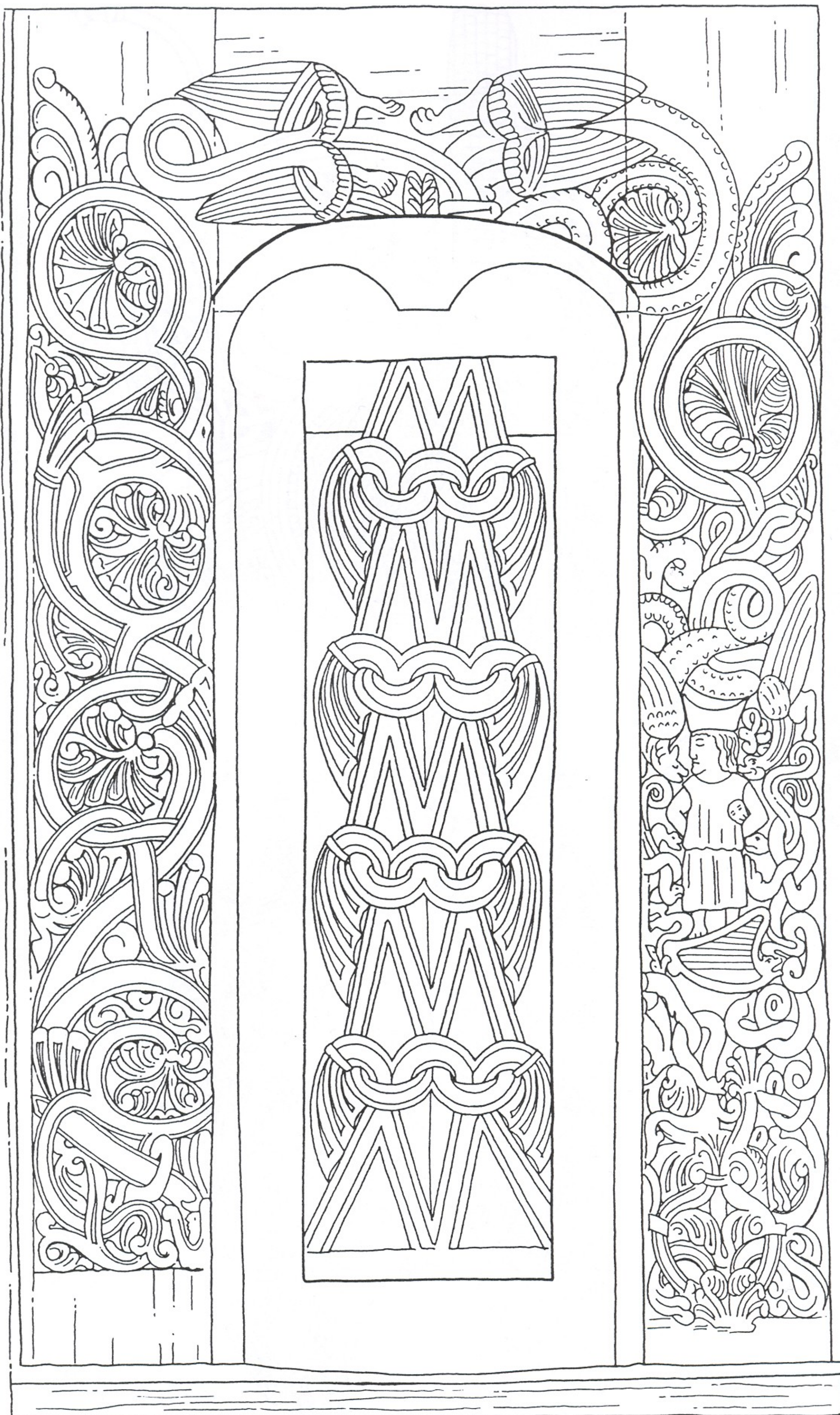
TOP: Brooch (Bornholm, Denmark). BOTTOM: Three silver sword hilts (Norway).



CENTER: Sled carving (Oseberg, Norway). RIGHT & LEFT: Carvings from stem and sternpost of the Oseberg ship (Norway).



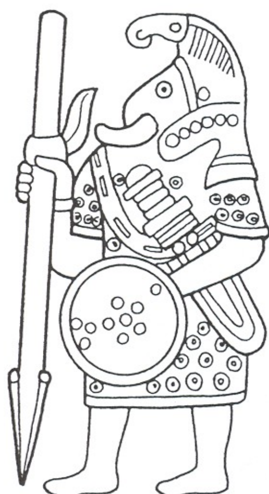
TOP: Two bone sword hilts (Sigtuna, Sweden). BOTTOM CENTER: Whalebone plaque (Northern Norway). BOTTOM RIGHT: Bone pin (Tronheim, Norway). BOTTOM LEFT: Bone pin (River Thames, London, England).

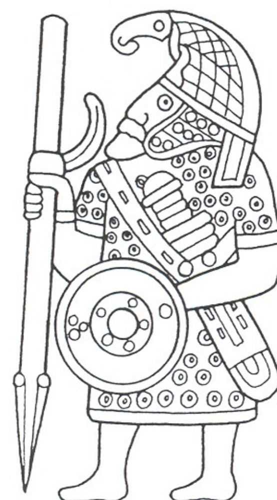


OUTER: Carved doorway of Opdal Church (Norway). INNER: Domestic window jam (Norway).

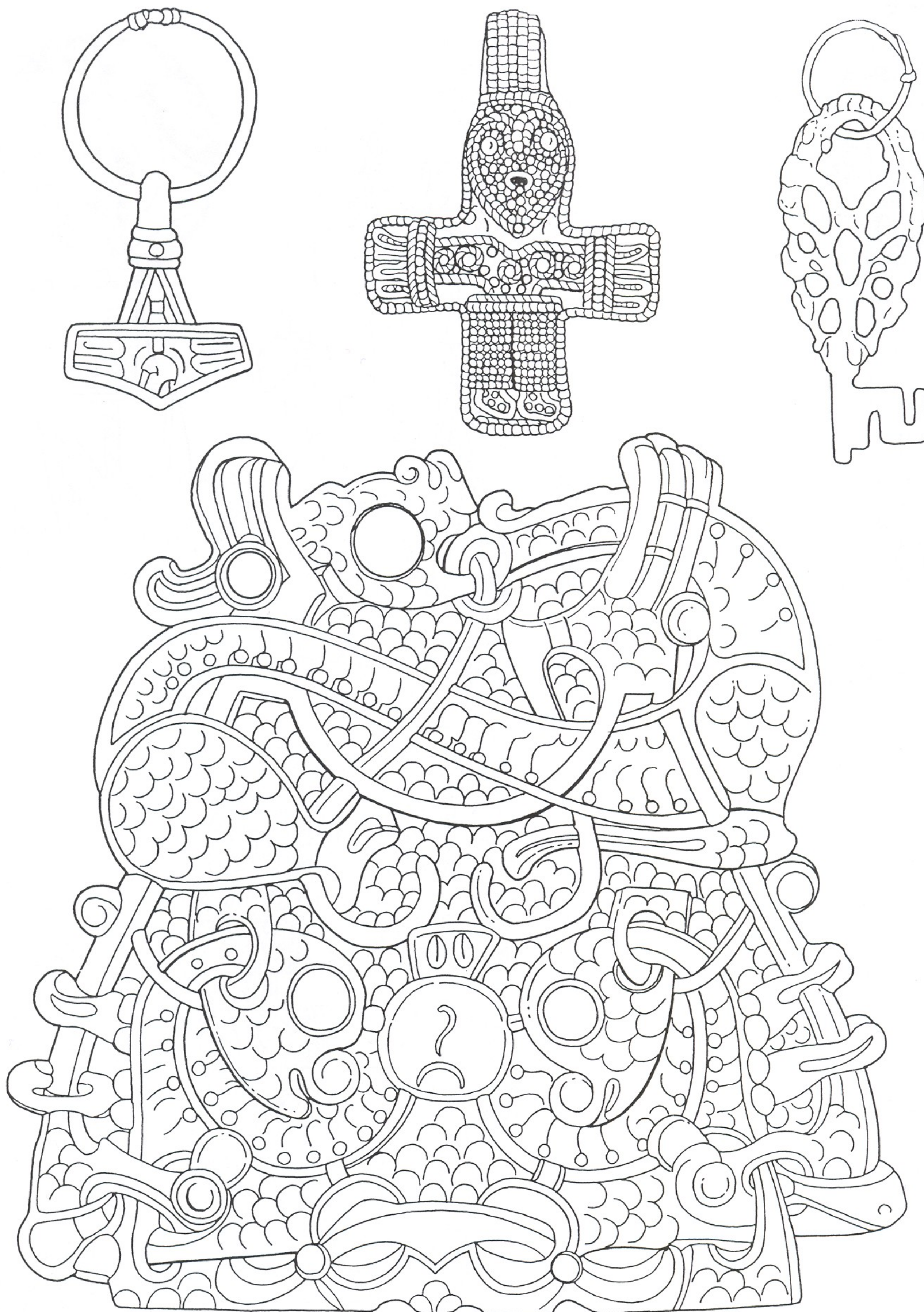




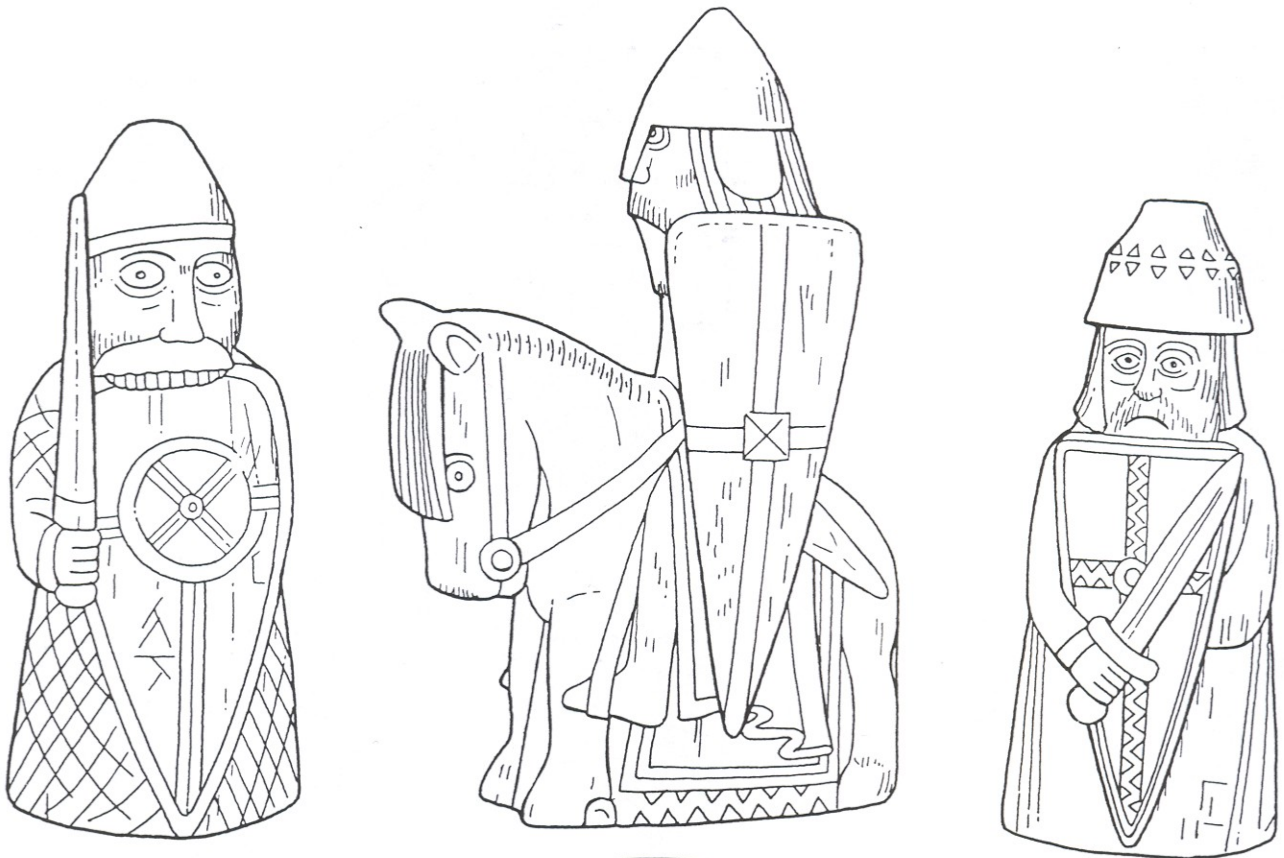




TOP RIGHT & LEFT: Inlaid ornament from shoulder clasps (Sutton Hoo, England). CENTER: Ornamental buckle (Sutton Hoo, England). BOTTOM LEFT & RIGHT: Stylized warriors (Valsgärde, Sweden).



Top left: Pendant showing Thor's Hammer (Gotland, Sweden). Top center: Silver crucifix (Birka, Uppland, Sweden). Top right: Bronze key (Gotland, Sweden). Bottom: Gilt-bronze bridle mount (Gotland, Sweden).

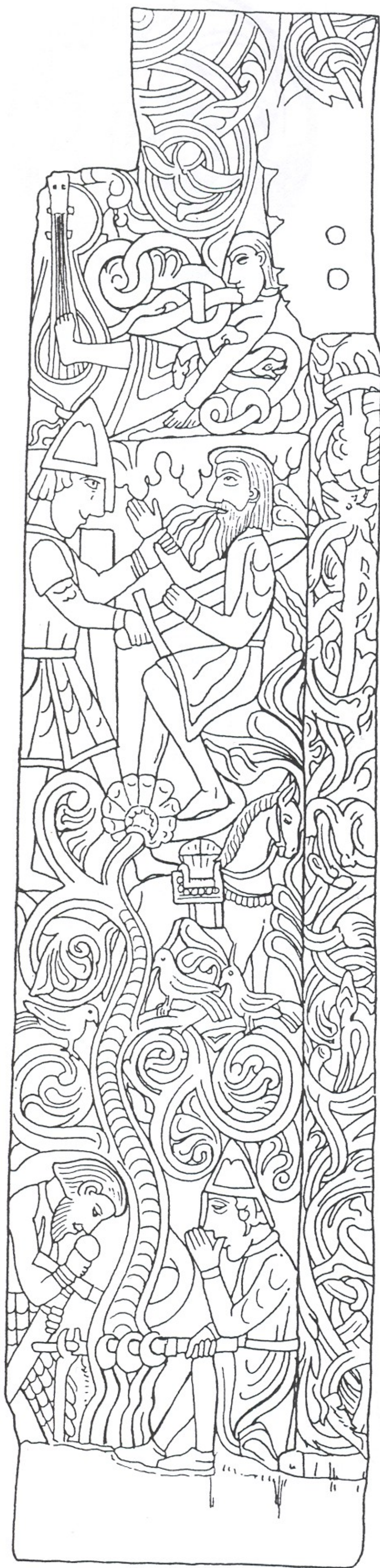


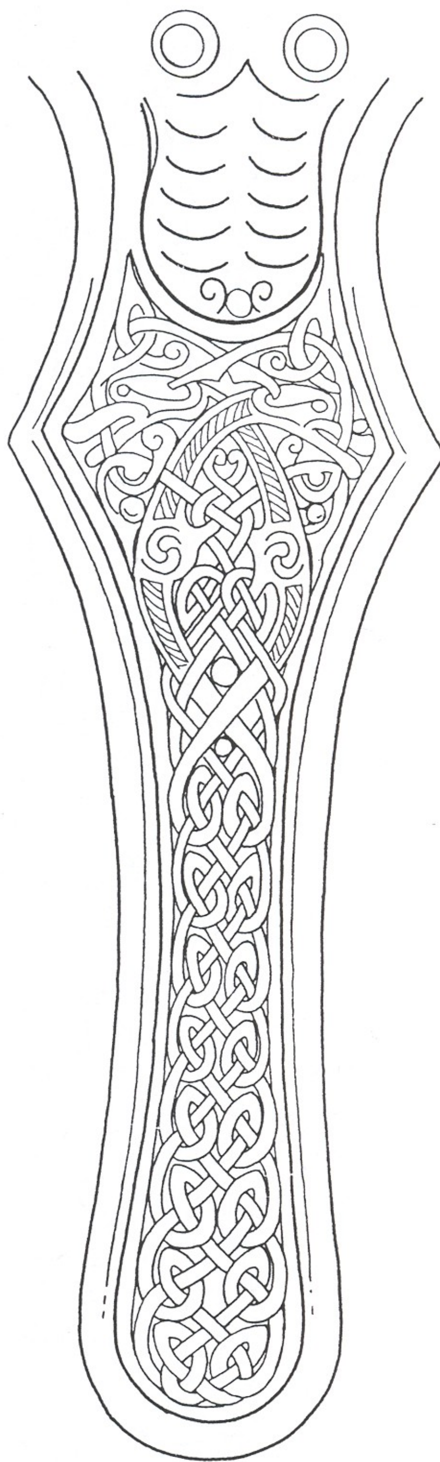
TOP: Ivory chessmen (Isle of Lewis, Scotland). BOTTOM CENTER: Shoulder clasp (Sutton Hoo, England). BOTTOM LEFT & RIGHT: Plates from Bamberg Casket (Bamberg, Germany, Norwegian origin).

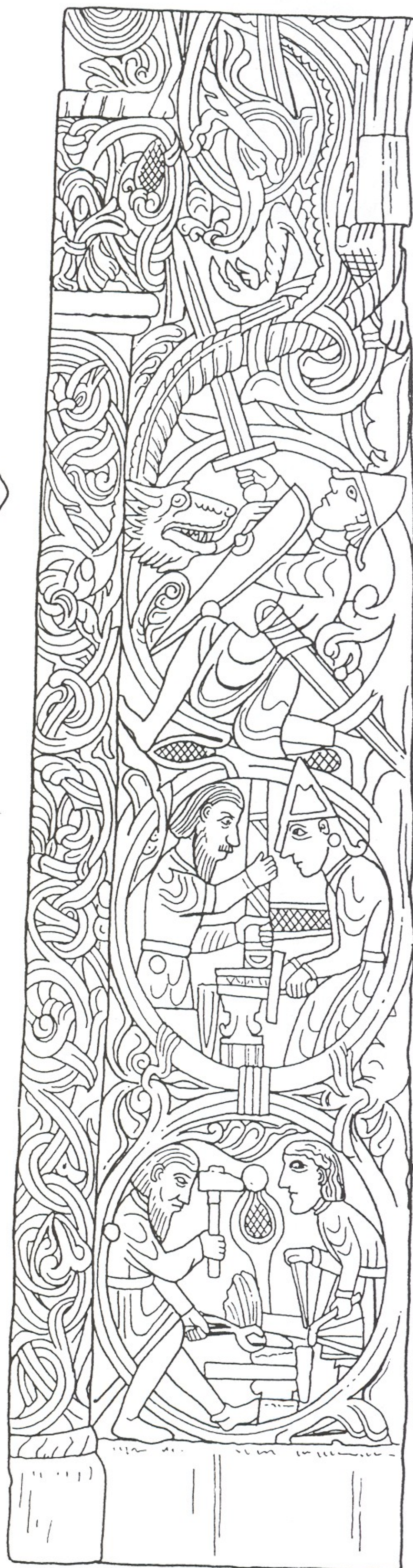




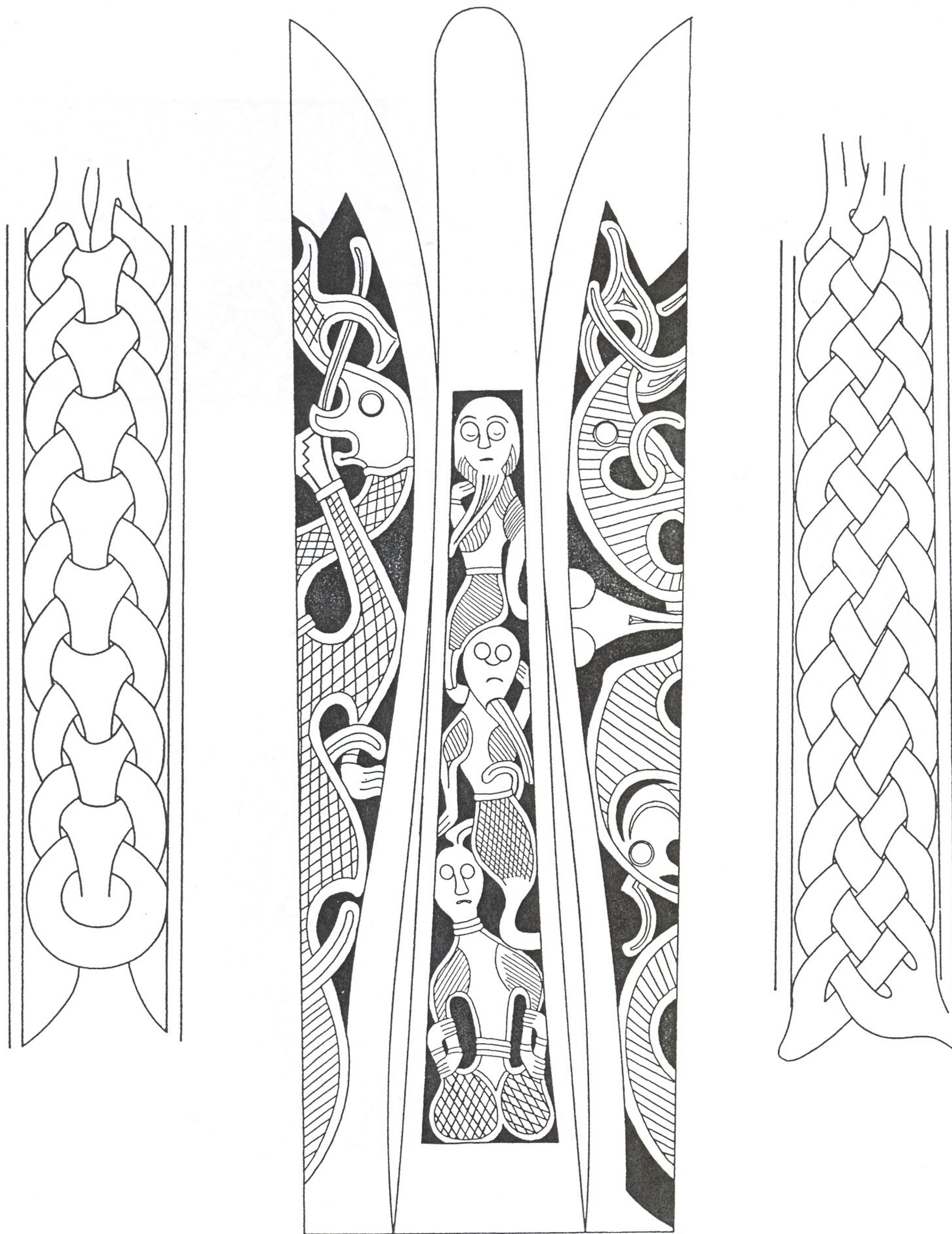
CENTER: Ornament from carved animal head post (Oseberg, Norway). UPPER RIGHT & LEFT: Details of animal ornament from a sword pommel (Gotland, Sweden).



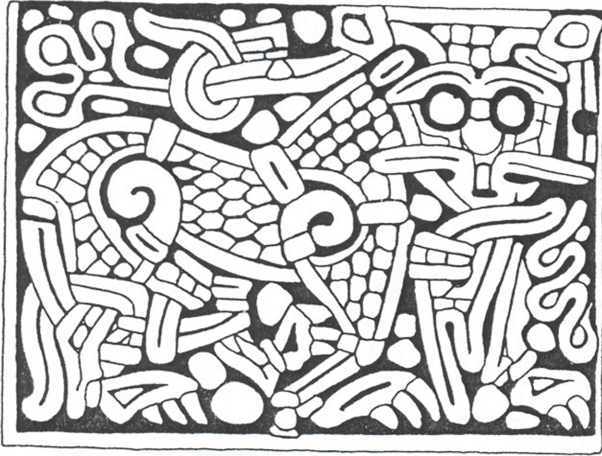


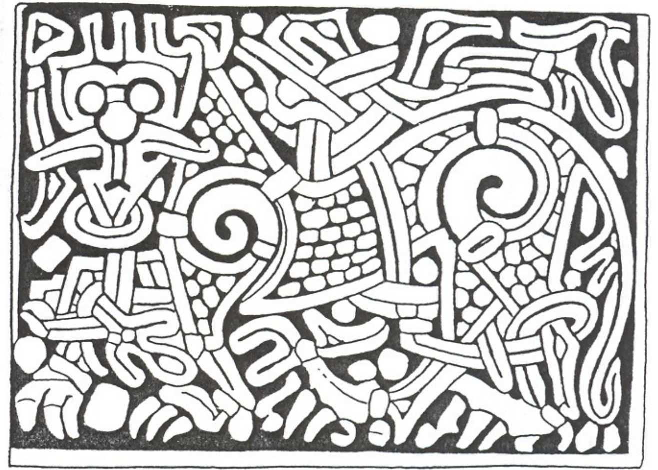


RIGHT & LEFT: Door jams from Hyllestad Church (Norway). CENTER: Nose guard from helmet (York, England).

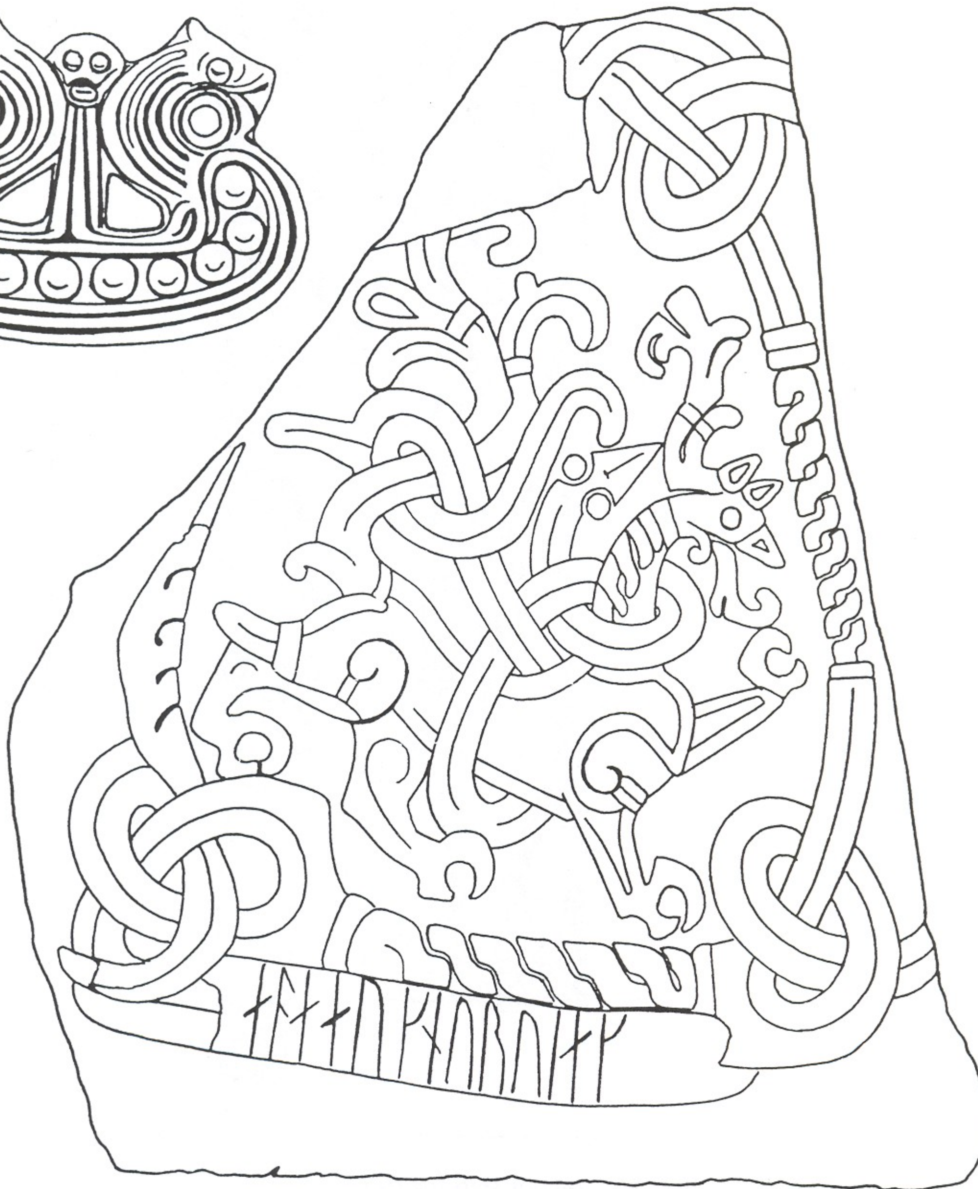


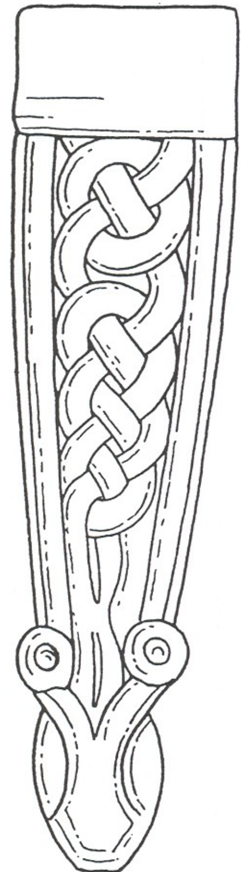
CENTER: Detail from the prow of the Oseberg ship (Norway). RIGHT & LEFT: Interlacing ornaments from the Gosforth cross, (Cumbria, England).



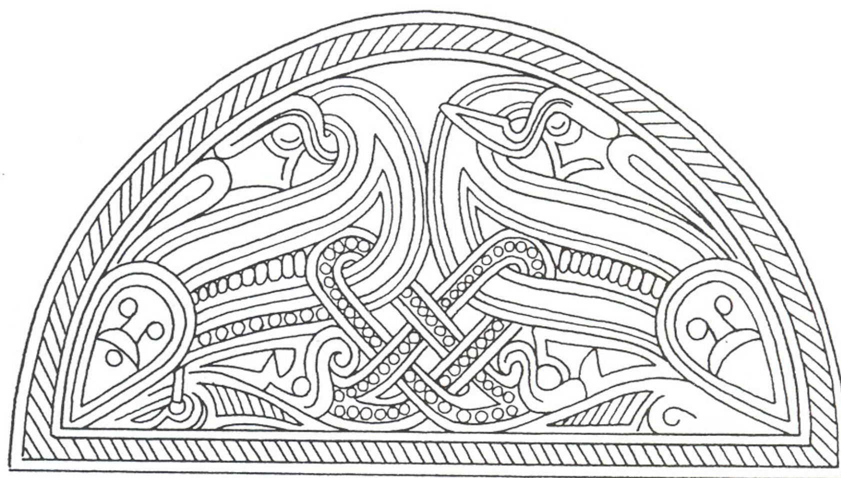


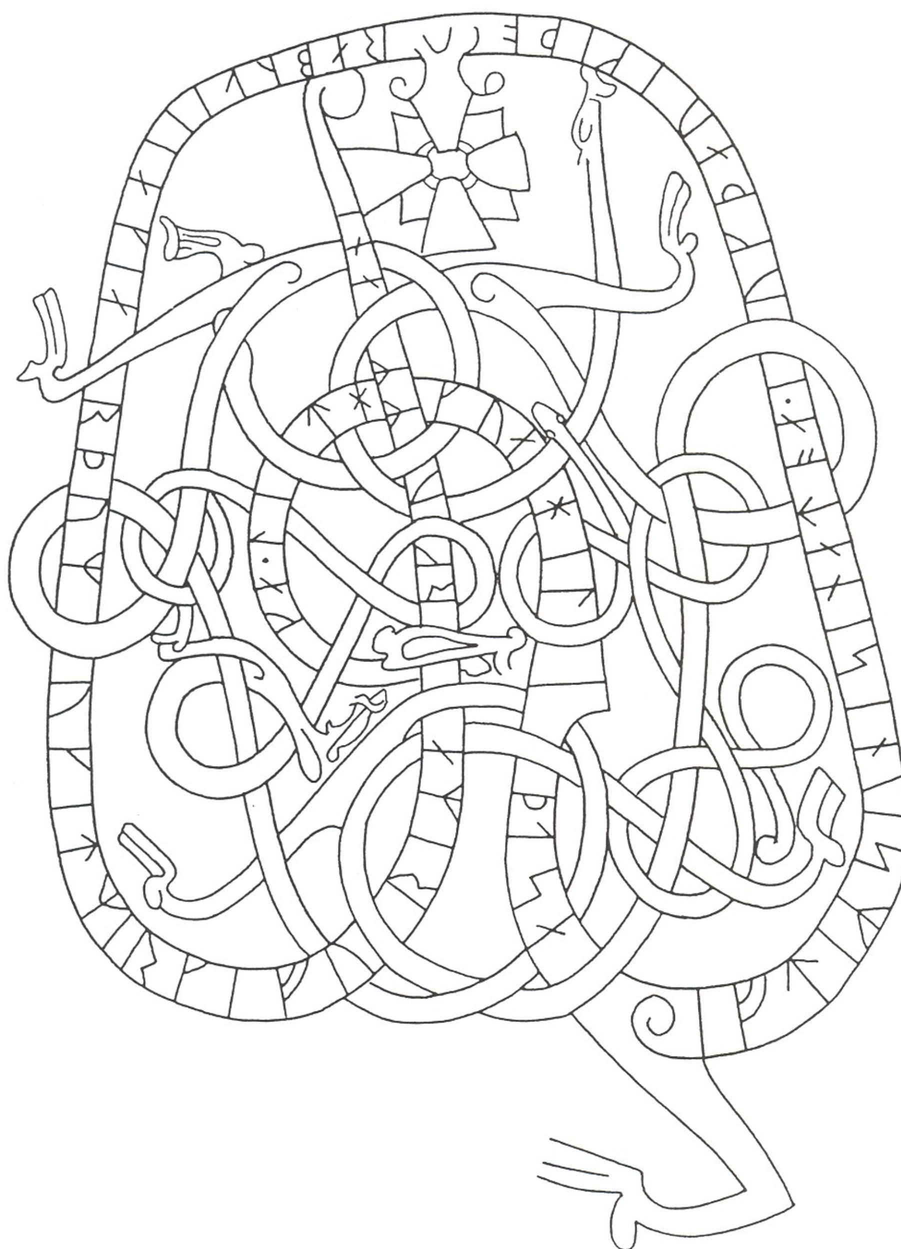






TOP RIGHT & LEFT: Two Mammen-style walrus ivory panels from the Bamberg Casket (Bamberg, Germany, Norwegian origin). BOTTOM CENTER: King Harald's Stone (Jelling, Jutland, Denmark). BOTTOM RIGHT: Copper alloy strap end (York, England). BOTTOM LEFT: Brooch (Bornholm, Denmark).





TOP: Shield mount (Valsgärde, Sweden). BOTTOM: Runic rock carving (Sollentuna, Sweden). LEFT: Ornament from metalwork (Bornholm, Denmark). RIGHT: Ornament from sword scabbard (Valsgärde, Sweden).